

# Inspection of The Forum School

Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0QS

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Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Sixth-form provision

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Over the past year, the school has experienced considerable turbulence in leadership and staff turnover. This has had a negative impact on the quality of education pupils receive. However, current leaders are ambitious for pupils. They are taking decisive action to bring about improvements to the curriculum, including in the sixth form.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for in this welcoming school. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and positive. Well-planned morning routines, including wake up exercises, encourage pupils to communicate and interact with staff and each other. This helps pupils prepare for the day ahead.

Most pupils join the school after significant periods of disruption to their previous education. Staff are adept at noticing when to intervene if pupils show any signs of anxiety. Learning flows smoothly. Occasionally, some pupils struggle, but staff are on hand to help pupils self-regulate. Behaviour records and discussions with staff confirm that bullying happens rarely.

Pupils gain confidence from weekly horse riding and swimming. They learn about important cultural celebrations and events, such as Remembrance Day. However, opportunities to develop pupils' talents and cultivate new interests are in their infancy.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Senior leaders, including the proprietor, have made many improvements to the school's curriculum in a short space of time. Expectations have risen significantly. Recent changes to leadership roles, for example in reading and the sixth form, have been carefully considered. Leaders recognise that checks on the implementation of the curriculum have not been robust enough. They have clear plans in place to address this.

Pupils study a wide range of subjects. Leaders have mapped out the end points they want pupils to work towards in all curriculum areas. However, in some subjects, such as mathematics and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, leaders have not broken down this important knowledge into small, manageable chunks. Consequently, pupils do not progressively build their knowledge well enough in these subjects over time.

Conversely, the school's specialist equine curriculum is of high quality. Staff have meticulously designed a well-sequenced programme. It sets out the important content pupils need to learn. Staff revisit prior learning to embed knowledge. They take every opportunity to weave the basics into practical sessions. For example, pupils use fractions to measure horse feed and read signs during indoor arena work. Pupils develop their knowledge and skills over time and achieve well. Most complete a range of award programmes, including stable management and horse riding.

Nonetheless, work to replicate this in other outdoor learning subjects is in its infancy.

Leaders identified that the reading curriculum lacked ambition. They have raised expectations and put in place a consistent approach to teaching phonics. Pupils, including those in the sixth form, now have regular phonics sessions. Staff recognise that most pupils are at the very early stages of learning to read. Each pupil has a 'reading profile' to help staff identify the individual support needed to catch up. However, not enough staff have the expertise to teach phonics effectively. Some do not pronounce sounds accurately. While pupils read well-selected books in class, they cannot take them home. This means that they do not get enough practice to catch up and become fluent readers.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff receive regular training in how to support pupils with complex needs. As a result, staff understand how to develop pupils' communication skills so they can learn the curriculum. For example, they use signs, symbols and electronic devices to help non-verbal pupils communicate.

Staff take a keen interest in supporting pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs. For instance, they reinforce positive social skills when eating lunch together. All pupils have personalised behaviour plans. These outline strategies to defuse potentially challenging behaviour. Over time, most pupils learn to regulate their emotions effectively.

The school's careers programme stalled during COVID-19 but is starting again. Leaders have designed three clear pathways that pupils can follow to support their further education, supported living and employment. Through the 'community living' pathway, staff assist pupils when taking part in local volunteering and work experience. In the sixth form, a weekly 'college meeting' ensures that pupils have a voice in teachers' decisions. For example, pupils volunteer at a local gardening project to nurture their interest in horticulture. However, leaders recognise that careers education is in the early stages of development.

Leaders' work to develop pupils' life skills is beginning to take hold. In cooking sessions, pupils learn to use appliances safely and follow recipes to make scones and cupcakes. Leaders have started to weave the teaching of British values and relationship education into other areas of the curriculum. This helps pupils learn about the importance of respect. For example, some pupils walked to the local memorial to lay wreaths for Remembrance Day.

Staff state that leaders are approachable and consider their well-being. There is a collective view that leaders have set the school on a trajectory of improvement. All staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire said they were proud to work at the school. Parents value the daily and weekly reports from staff. However, some would welcome more timely communication about their children's academic progress.

The proprietor has introduced a robust cycle of monitoring to quality assure the provision. This includes regular visits from specialist consultants. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this positive change. The proprietor has ensured that the school meets the independent school standards and the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff receive effective training on the signs to look out for when pupils are at risk. They know the procedures to follow when reporting concerns. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to get pupils any support they need. They carry out checks to ensure that adults are safe to work with pupils.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations. They know ways to stay safe in the stables and the swimming pool.

The safeguarding policies and procedures are published on the school's website.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- The proprietor and leaders do not have enough oversight of the quality of education pupils receive. Some pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders need to ensure that systems are in place to check that the curriculum is implemented effectively in all subjects.
- In some subjects, leaders are not clear enough about the important knowledge they want pupils to know. This means that pupils do not develop the same depth of knowledge across all subjects. Leaders must ensure that the curriculums for all subjects identify the most important knowledge so that pupils know more and remember more over time.
- Not all staff have the expertise to help pupils learn to read effectively. This hinders some pupils' ability to read confidently and fluently. Leaders need to ensure that all staff working with pupils have the expertise they need to help pupils catch up with their reading. Leaders should also arrange for pupils to take books home so they can practise their reading skills.
- The careers programme is in the early stages of development. There are too few opportunities to develop pupils' talents and interests. Leaders' plans to strengthen the careers education should now be implemented across the school.
- Leaders do not have a consistent approach to communicating with parents. As a result, some parents do not feel well informed about their children's progress. Leaders should improve how they communicate with parents so that they understand the work the school is doing to support their children's education.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116593
<b>DfE registration number</b>	838/6033
<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	10252311
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	18
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	6
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	None
<b>Proprietor</b>	Cambian Group
<b>Chair</b>	Farouk Sheikh
<b>Principal</b>	Daniel Pitt
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£95,172
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 507 3723
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cambianguroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/">www.cambianguroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school/</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:forum.admin@cambianguroup.com">forum.admin@cambianguroup.com</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	3 to 5 December 2019

## Information about this school

- The Forum School is one of several independent special schools operated by the proprietor, Cambian Group.
- A new principal took up post in February 2022, following a period of interim leadership. All teachers are new to post in September 2022, including the assistant headteacher.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include autism spectrum disorders and/or severe communication difficulties. Some pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, head of education and other senior leaders to discuss aspects of the school. The lead inspector met with a representative of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, PSHE education and the school's specialist provision in outdoor learning. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, talked to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An adult was present when inspectors spoke with pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation. They met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and scrutinised safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school and the single central record. Inspectors considered how well safeguarding leaders act on concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Inspectors talked to staff about the school's safeguarding practice.
- The lead inspector discussed the school with a representative of the Dorset local authority SEND team.
- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to confirm whether the independent school standards were met in full. This included a tour of the school premises, a

scrutiny of risk assessments and the policies in place to promote the well-being of pupils.

- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and responses to the staff survey. The lead inspector spoke to several parents on the telephone.

### **Inspection team**

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Non Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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