

Inspection of Gradually Developing Futures

Valley View Farm, Castle Farm Road, Lytchett Matravers, Dorset BH16 6DA

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Gradually Developing Futures is a unique place to learn. It has a successful approach to working with pupils who have missed a lot of school or have had a negative experience of education. In this nurturing farm setting, pupils develop their social skills, make friends and flourish as individuals.

Staff build positive relationships with pupils. This forms the bedrock of the school's work. They get to know pupils' needs and interests. Pupils quickly come to trust staff. They feel understood and valued for who they are. When pupils need space to regulate, staff support them skilfully. Over time, the school transforms pupils' behaviour.

The school has high expectations for pupils' learning. It has designed well-thought-out social and academic curriculum pathways to meet pupils' needs. Pupils listen intently and persevere with their learning. They work hard and benefit from a consistent structure to lessons. This helps them learn a lot from their different starting points.

Well-established routines provide a calm and purposeful start to each day. Pupils learn the importance of teamwork and responsibility when looking after and feeding the alpacas. 'Well-being Friday' is a popular part of the week. Pupils explore new interests such as photography and yoga.

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

All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). The school provides a carefully considered transition programme when pupils first join. This allows teachers to identify pupils' starting points and to integrate outcomes from their EHC plans. Where relevant, the school seeks advice from external professionals, such as speech and language therapists, to help meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, staff use signs and social stories to support pupils with limited speech to express their needs and wants. As a result, pupils develop their communication skills effectively.

The school has developed a well-sequenced and broad curriculum across the social and academic pathways. Teachers have secure knowledge of the curriculum. They present information clearly and use effective questioning to check pupils' understanding. Through purposeful and engaging project work, pupils apply their learning to different contexts. For example, they use their measurement, communication and computing skills when designing a pond on the farm. However, in a minority of subjects, the school has not identified the precise knowledge it wants pupils to learn. Occasionally, some activities do not contribute well enough to pupils' learning. This makes it difficult for pupils to deepen and connect their knowledge over time.

Many pupils arrive at school as reluctant readers. The school's work to foster pupils' enjoyment of reading is a strength. Staff select books that interest pupils. They provide effective phonics support to help pupils overcome any barriers to learning. Pupils make rapid gains. Many become skilled in reading with accuracy and fluency. Nonetheless, some pupils do not make the same progress in their writing. At times, staff do not prioritise the essential writing skills that pupils need to secure such as handwriting and punctuation. This slows down some pupils' learning.

The school provides a comprehensive programme of personal and social development. Through well-being sessions, pupils build their self-esteem and confidence. Immersive experiences, such as Iranian day, add to pupils' cultural awareness. Assemblies develop pupils' understanding of world issues. Pupils embrace the school's values of 'kindness' and 'respect' when interacting with one another, adults and visitors. Their behaviour, attitudes and attendance improve markedly after joining the school. Much of this is due to the school's high expectations and consistency of approach.

The careers programme is beginning to take shape. Staff take pupils' interests into account when discussing career choices. However, some pupils are not as well informed about the diverse range of career options available to them in their next stage of education. This means that sometimes, pupils do not get the guidance they need to pursue a broad range of next steps.

A culture of teamwork exists. Staff value the training they receive. They report that leaders consider their workload and well-being. Parents and carers also speak with great enthusiasm about the school's work. They appreciate how staff 'go above and beyond' to support their children.

The proprietor works in collaboration with governors and external experts to provide support and challenge. It has successfully ensured that the school meets the independent school standards (the standards) and complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The proprietor maintains the buildings to an acceptable standard. Relevant risk assessments are in place for the farm environment. Parents can access the school's safeguarding information from the website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a minority of subjects, the school has not identified the precise knowledge it wants pupils to learn. Occasionally, some activities do not support pupils to learn important subject content. This makes it difficult for pupils to deepen and connect their knowledge as well as they could over time. The school needs to set out

clearly what it wants pupils to learn in all subjects and provide suitable activities to help pupils learn well across the curriculum.

- At times, staff do not prioritise the essential writing skills that pupils need to secure. As a result, some pupils' written work contains basic errors. The school should ensure that staff provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to master early writing skills so that pupils can increase their success across the curriculum.
- Some pupils are not as well informed as they might be about potential career options. This means that sometimes, pupils do not get the guidance they need to pursue a broad range of next steps. The school should provide all secondary-age pupils with a broader range of careers guidance so they are well informed about their potential next steps in education, employment and training.

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

Unique reference number	148046
DfE registration number	838/6013
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10391797
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	GDF Consultancy.com Limited
Chair	James Gregory
Principal	Lisa O'Connor (Principal) James Gregory (Executive Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£64,380 to £94,350
Telephone number	07984 274 303
Website	www.graduatelydevelopingfutures.co.uk
Email address	jag@gdfconsultancy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2022

Information about this school

- Gradually Developing Futures provides education for pupils with autism and social and communication needs. It is based on farm site in the Dorset village of Lytchett Matravers.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- Pupils are placed in the school by Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole local authorities.
- The proprietor successfully applied for a material change in March 2023 to increase the age range of pupils from 11 to 14.
- Changes to leadership have occurred in the past year. The principal started in September 2024.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal, who is also the chief executive officer of the proprietor body, the principal, the headteacher and a range of staff to discuss aspects of the school's work. The lead inspector held remote meetings with the head of SEND and with the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social, emotional and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum documentation and samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector listened to a range of pupils reading.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and

considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors conducted a range of activities to confirm whether the school met the standards in full. This included health and safety checks of the premises, risk assessments, record-keeping for behaviour management and supervision during social times.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and the school's arrangements for supervising pupils on their arrival at school, in classrooms and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Claire Mirams

Ofsted Inspector

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