

My Choice School – Oak House

Independent special school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mike Kell
Social care inspector	Paul Taylor

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is located in the annex of a large family house in a residential area. The school admits students from the age of 11 to 16 who are looked after children and resident in the adjacent house, which is a children's home that provides education.

This is the first time that the school has been inspected since it opened in late 2008. There are currently two students on roll who are aged 15 years, both of whom have a statement of special educational needs for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. All students, past and current, have a history of non-attendance at their previous schools along with highly challenging behaviour. The school aims to promote students' self-esteem and positive behaviour; to develop their achievement and skills; to involve parents and carers in a joint approach to education; and to prepare students for adult life. The school describes its role as 'primarily a transition programme and not a long-term option for pupils'. As students develop and mature, they are encouraged to transfer into a mainstream school while remaining resident in the children's home.

EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL

The school meets its aims because students make sufficient progress to be able to move back into mainstream schools while remaining as residents of the school. The school provides a satisfactory quality of education, and students make satisfactory progress overall in their learning. Teaching is adequate and the curriculum is satisfactory. However, negative attitudes still prevail and there is some unacceptable behaviour and poor attendance. Nevertheless, this still represents satisfactory progress overall given students' very low starting points. Students are safe; there is satisfactory provision for ensuring the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of students. Although there are robust procedures for vetting people involved with the

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

school in whatever capacity, the school fails to maintain the required information on a single central register. The school meets most regulations for independent schools.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school provides courses and other activities that meet the immediate, educational and other needs of its young people. The curriculum is planned to provide a variety of subjects and learning experiences that mirror mainstream education as far as possible in order to facilitate a successful reintegration in the future. The curriculum takes particular account of the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs.

The curriculum is built around the Unit Award Scheme, which accredits students when they complete short units of work. The school offers units in a number of topics in a range of subjects, and at three different levels of difficulty. The subject matter is tailored to match individual students' needs and capabilities. This arrangement enables them to receive quick recognition for success in accredited courses, and it ensures a broad and balanced curriculum. Due weight is given to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills and there is a strong and appropriate emphasis on personal, social and health education and life skills, such as cooking. Core subjects such as science and information and communication technology are also taught, and breadth is provided by subjects like geography and history. The absence of specialist space for art, design and technology and science limits the topics and depth of study that can be pursued. Community-based learning, such as a recent visit to the local transport museum, and the use of local facilities like a leisure centre enrich the curriculum well. The boarding provision makes an excellent contribution by enabling students to practise their social and communication skills in real-life situations. Despite this use of the community and links with the Connexions service, there are only limited opportunities for older students to follow a work-related learning programme through work experience and college links.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Staff are very conscious of students' physical and emotional well-being and how fragile this can be. They work successfully to develop the trusting relationships that have to be in place before any learning can take place. This is helped by virtually all teaching being one to one. Assessment of students' achievements is ongoing through the unit awards and so staff are well placed to plan activities that build on students' prior learning, and they have the resources to do this. However, although staff are in a good position to accelerate students' learning, they are only partially successful in doing so. The main reason for this lies in the lack of clarity, precision and expectation in some lesson planning. Activities do not always present sufficient challenge and expected learning outcomes are too vaguely worded to enable either staff or students to make informed judgements on how successful learning has been. Much of the teaching is carried out by residential care staff in the role of teaching assistants although all planning is done by the teacher. In some instances, planning does not always have enough detail to help the teaching assistants to accelerate the pace of learning.

SPIRITUAL, MORAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUPILS

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. The unit award model for the curriculum presents good opportunities for the school to promote many aspects of students' personal development. Staff use this effectively to build students' confidence, independence, and communication and social skills in preparation for adulthood. Topics such as household budgeting, opening a bank account, time routines, and applying for jobs prepare students well for leaving school. Other units, such as consideration of different faiths and beliefs, provide an awareness of living in modern multicultural Britain. The idea of citizenship is promoted through subjects such as history and geography and through community-based learning. The boarding provision does an extremely good job in supplementing what the school does.

In contrast, in other aspects students do less well. They have too few opportunities to work together or to contribute to the school, although they are made aware of the responsibilities of living in a community. Despite devoting a great deal of effort to establishing the idea of a community and of the importance of following rules, respecting others and accepting responsibility for one's own actions, the students' response is often negative. However, taken as a whole, and given their low starting points, students overall make sufficient progress and their behaviour is satisfactory.

WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PUPILS

The welfare, health and safety of students are promoted satisfactorily. The school has in place robust procedures for safeguarding students by ensuring that the proprietors, staff and supply staff are suitable to work with children. All the necessary checks are undertaken. The child protection policy and associated procedures are rigorously defined and are well understood by staff.

Other elements of provision are equally effective. There are good policies and procedures for preventing bullying and a very high level of staff supervision ensures that the opportunities when this might happen are kept to a minimum. Routines to maintain students' safety are followed closely, such as maintaining fire fighting equipment, evacuating the building and training staff in first aid. Well-prepared risk assessments help to protect students in school and off site. However, the school does not record all of the detail that is required.

Instances of a particularly serious nature are recorded, and the few instances when physical restraint has to be used to defuse situations are logged correctly. If misbehaviour warrants them, sanctions are administered fairly and recorded appropriately. These actions are carried out in line with the school's comprehensive policy to promote good behaviour. While the procedures are clearly effective in the vast majority of instances, just occasionally they do not have the desired effect and alternative strategies are not implemented. The school's admissions register does not record all the required information.

Students know about staying safe and they understand the importance of healthy eating and about threats to their health although they do not always choose to follow the advice.

The school's effective three-year action plan ensures that it complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended.³

SUITABILITY OF STAFF, SUPPLY STAFF AND PROPRIETORS

Despite its vigilance in vetting staff, the school does not meet the regulations because of administrative failures. It does not maintain a single central register that contains details of all the checks made on the proprietors, all members of staff and other adults.

PREMISES AND ACCOMMODATION AT THE SCHOOL

The school and adjoining children's home are sited in a spacious garden that provides ample space for outdoor activities. The overall building, of which the annex is an integral part, is in a good state of repair. The annex itself is maintained to an equally good standard and it provides a safe and secure teaching space. It is weatherproof, warm, well lit, clean and decorated to a good standard. Lessons are not disturbed by traffic or other extraneous noise. The two small classrooms are adequate in size for general teaching but there are no specialist areas for practical subjects.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION

The proprietor ensures that almost all the information that the school is required to provide to prospective parents, carers, and local authorities is up to date. In addition, the school has prepared virtually all of the supplementary information that it has to make available to these different groups. This does not include, however, any indication of the educational and welfare provision that it might offer students who are learning English as an additional language.

MANNER IN WHICH COMPLAINTS ARE TO BE HANDLED

The management of complaints is dictated by a succinct comprehensive policy and supporting procedures that comply with the regulations.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BOARDING PROVISION

The care provision was judged to be outstanding, and national minimum standards were met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.⁴

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of students (standards in part 3) and must:

- complete the admission register to show the address of the last school that students attended, and emergency telephone numbers of parents or carers where appropriate, in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006⁵ (paragraph 17).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors (standards in part 4) and must:

- establish a single central register of the required information to determine the suitability of the proprietors, staff and supply staff, and ensure that the register is capable of being reproduced in a legible form (paragraph 22(2))
- ensure for each member of staff appointed on or **after** 1 May 2007, that the register shows that the following checks were made, including the date on which each check was completed or the certificate obtained:
 - the person's identity
 - the person is not barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (ISA barred list), or there is no direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act in respect of that person (List 99), or disqualification prohibition or restriction having the same effect
 - of relevant qualifications, if appropriate
 - whether an enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) certificate was obtained
 - in the case of any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, the further checks made which have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State
 - the person's right to work in the United Kingdom
 - in the case of staff who care for, train, supervise or are in charge of children for whom accommodation is provided, a check was made to ensure compliance with Standard 38 of the national minimum standards for boarding schools, or where applicable, Standard 27 of

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061751.htm

the national minimum standards for residential special schools (paragraph 22(3))

- ensure in relation to staff not directly employed by the school, that the register shows whether written notification has been received from the employment business that it has carried out the checks referred to in 20(2)(a) together with the date the written notification that each check was made or certificate obtained was received. Checks required include:
 - the person's identity
 - that the person is not barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (ISA barred list), or there is no direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act in respect of that person (List 99), or disqualification prohibition or restriction having the same effect
 - where appropriate, the person's qualifications
 - in the case of any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, checks in regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State
 - the person's right to work in the United Kingdom
 - an enhanced criminal record bureau (CRB) check or has obtained a certificate in response to such a check made by it or another employment business. The CRB check must have been obtained no more than three months before the date on which the person is due to begin work at the school; or the person has already had an enhanced CRB check from working in a school or further education institution not more than three months previously
 - if an enhanced CRB certificate was obtained before the person was due to begin work and if it contained a disclosure, the school obtained a copy of the certificate from the employment business (paragraph 22(5))

- ensure in relation to each member of a body of persons named as the proprietor who was appointed at any time before **1 May 2007**, that the register shows whether the checks referred to in 21(6)(b) were made, the date they were made and the date on which the resulting certificate was obtained. Checks required include:
 - an enhanced CRB check and, where requested by the Secretary of State, is countersigned by the Secretary of State
 and
 - in the case of any person for whom, by reason of living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, further checks in regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 22(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- determine particulars of educational and welfare provision for students who speak English as an additional language and then make them available to prospective parents, carers and local authorities (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home which should be read in conjunction with this report.

INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of pupils			✓	

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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The quality of boarding provision

Effectiveness of boarding provision	✓			
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SCHOOL DETAILS

School status	Independent special (behavioural, social and emotional difficulties)		
Type of school	Children's Home with education		
,Date school opened	December 2008		
Age range of pupils	11–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	Confidential		
Email address	a.murphy@my-choice-homes.com		
Headteacher	Annie Murphy		
Proprietor	My Choice Children's Homes Ltd		