

# My Choice School – Oak House

Unit 3a, Mill Green Business Estate, Mill Green Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1XQ

<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 October 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- Students make good progress in their academic learning, particularly in their numeracy and literacy skills, as a result of good teaching and a good curriculum.
- Teaching is dynamic, energetic and creative, and informed by continuous assessments of students' learning. As a result, students are challenged well and achieve well.
- The curriculum serves the needs of students well and provides them with exciting practical learning experiences.
- Students' welfare, health and safety are good, as a result of consistency of approach between the education and residential teams.
- The senior leaders have ensured that teaching and achievement are good and demonstrate a good capacity to further improve the school.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- Students' personal development is only adequate and does not support outstanding achievement. Some students have erratic attendance. They have few opportunities to contribute to school life and the wider community and further extend their social skills.
- Teachers do not always use the information from assessments to provide a consistently high level of challenge for students to enable them to make outstanding progress.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Three lessons or sessions were observed, including a reading session, taught by one teacher.
- The inspector examined students' work, the school's management plan, and documentation including curriculum and lesson plans and assessments. Meetings were held with the headteacher, current and previous teachers, care staff and students.
- The inspector also examined policies, procedures and other documentation relating to the provision for students' welfare, health and safety.
- The views of staff, one placing authority and students were considered. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

## Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Oak House is a very small independent special school catering for residential students which provides education for boys and girls aged from 11 to 16 years. It opened in December 2008 and had its last inspection in October 2010.
- The school admits students who have severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which prevent their attendance at a mainstream school. Some students display extremely challenging behaviour and have additional learning needs. Students typically join the school with a history of disrupted education. Students currently attending the school are 14 years old. They all have a statement of special educational needs and are in the care of the local authority that places them. The school frequently does not have any students on roll. There were none in the school between September 2011 and February 2013. Students joined the school in February 2013 at very short notice. The school makes use of additional off-site provision to provide part-time vocational courses for some students in Key Stage 4 and access to a wide range of physical activities.
- The teaching staff are led and managed by a headteacher who oversees seven other schools. The leadership and management team includes the headteacher, two managers and two directors. The current teacher joined the school in September 2013. From February to July 2013, students were taught by a peripatetic teacher who is permanently employed by the proprietors.
- The school aims 'to raise self-esteem and to promote positive behaviour, so that students achieve a place at a college of further education or employment, and to work in partnership with parents and carers'.

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

- Further develop students' personal development by:
  - widening the range of strategies used to improve the attendance of all students
  - giving students opportunities to contribute to school life and the wider community and so develop a sense of social responsibility and further extend their social skills
  - ensuring that students have first-hand experiences of a diversity of beliefs to supplement their theoretical knowledge
  - widening the range of contexts in which students learn to keep safe.
- Remove bullet
- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
  - providing a consistently high level of challenge to students to enable them to make outstanding progress
  - embedding the use of the recently introduced assessment system so that teachers always use information from assessments to challenge students and help them gain a clear understanding of what to do to improve
  - developing teachers' expertise and confidence to teach all subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Students' achievement is good as a result of good teaching, good pastoral care and a good curriculum. Students join the school with a history of severely disrupted education and some have been out of education for up to one year. Consequently, they typically have literacy and numeracy skills that are low in relation to expectations for their age and significant gaps in their knowledge. Students are helped to re-engage in education by very supportive pastoral care provided by residential and education staff who form cohesive teams and use a consistent approach to managing students' behaviour and building up their self-confidence.

Students make good progress in filling the gaps in their knowledge owing to very effective use of baseline and continuous assessments to plan lessons that challenge them well. They make good progress in their reading, writing, numeracy and communication skills as a result of the great emphasis placed on teaching basic skills and a wide range of opportunities for applying these skills in most subject areas. For example, while researching the history and geography of Hastings, students have developed their research, word-processing, reading and writing skills. Students practise and improve their reading skills successfully while reading a variety of texts daily, which serves particularly well the needs of those who do not respond so positively to timetabled reading sessions. They apply their numeracy skills when shopping for food within a given budget, thereby also gaining practical life skills. Students make good progress in several subjects, well served by a curriculum that enables them to learn very effectively by working through small units at a time which recognises every stepping stone in their progress. Their achievement is not outstanding because the teaching does not provide a consistently high level of challenge to help them make outstanding progress. Also, in the case of some students, attendance is not sufficiently regular to support their outstanding achievement. Students are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education and move on to college.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Adequate**

Students' behaviour and personal development are adequate and reflect their adequate spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students make good improvement in their behaviour as a result of good pastoral care and consistent management of their behaviour. School and residential staff work extremely well together to create a nurturing environment, supported by well-written individual behaviour plans and appropriate training. All staff are skilful at using de-escalating strategies and helping students to manage their anger, frustration and anxiety. Consequently, serious behaviour incidents considerably reduce over time and students' improving behaviour contributes to the calm learning environment that prevails. Students show an adequate rather than good awareness of how to keep safe. This is because they do not learn to keep safe in a sufficiently wide range of social contexts. Bullying is very rare and students are strongly encouraged to challenge racist remarks. When, on occasion, behaviour deteriorates slightly during lessons, students are speedily re-engaged and participate actively in learning. Students are visibly happy, as noted by placing authorities. While some students make good progress in their attendance over time, others, who have difficulty in managing transitions between different parts of the day and joined the school more recently, make erratic progress in adhering to daily routines. The school liaises with specialist agencies and recognises that a wider range of strategies needs to be explored to promote regular attendance. Irregular attendance does not prevent the students concerned from achieving well owing to good teaching and students' high level of concentration and application when they do attend school. However, it is certainly a contributing factor for these students not making outstanding progress.

Personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is mainly taught through discrete lessons and through educational visits. Students have daily opportunities to reflect on their learning

and understand where their strengths and weaknesses lie. They develop adequate social skills overall. Some students have many opportunities to form positive relationships with a wide range of adults and young people, other than the school staff and peers, through attending college part time and social clubs. However, others have more limited experiences to extend their social skills because they attend school only and do not willingly engage in extra-curricular social activities. Also, students have few opportunities to develop a sense of social responsibility by contributing to school life and the local community. Students learn about a wide range of cultures and beliefs, including world religions, through the curriculum. However, their theoretical knowledge is not enhanced by first-hand experiences of religious diversity. Students gain a good awareness of public institutions through PSHCE and educational visits. The proprietors ensure that where controversial issues are debated, opposing arguments are presented without bias.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

The quality of teaching is good and enables students to achieve well. Teachers have an accurate knowledge of their students' abilities and needs, together with high expectations of what students can achieve. These are based on thorough identification of students' starting points and continuous assessment of their learning. The teaching is dynamic, energetic and creative and so successfully engages students in education. As a result, students participate actively in lessons and sustain their concentration. Students are challenged well through probing questions and tasks that match their needs closely. They are encouraged to develop good critical skills. Teaching assistants are thoroughly briefed by teachers about the objectives and content of lessons and their expected role, and so they support students' learning very effectively. They consistently model the expected learning attitudes and behaviour and often act as knowledgeable peers, which contributes to promoting students' good behaviour and raising the level of challenge provided for them. Teachers observe students' responses very closely and adjust the pace of learning, the level of questioning and the duration of the activity when necessary. This helps to maintain students' attention, enables them to experience success, and extends their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Teachers are experienced and well qualified. However, the school has identified that they need to develop their expertise and confidence to teach subjects that are not their specialism and it has clear plans to provide suitable training.

Assessment processes have greatly improved since the last inspection and have recently undergone further refinements. Students' learning is assessed on a weekly basis by a recently introduced online assessment system as they progress through bite-size units in each subject area. Teachers, senior leaders and students are given detailed information that diagnoses students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers use this information from assessments to adjust their lessons and challenge students, and to help them gain a clear understanding of what to do to improve. However, they do not do so consistently because the new system is not fully established. Consequently, students are not challenged at a consistently high level and do not make outstanding progress. This is why teaching is good rather than outstanding. The assessment system enables teachers to track students' progress against national norms, which motivates students well as they progress.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The curriculum is good and very effectively personalised to serve the learning needs of individual students well and support their good achievement. It is not yet outstanding for two reasons. First, the provision for students' personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) promotes their adequate rather than good personal development. Second, the current provision for information and communication technology (ICT), while being sufficient for teaching current students, does not support the widening of the curriculum to help students achieve even better. The breadth of the curriculum covers all the required areas of learning in both Key Stages 3 and 4. It is mainly built around the AQA unit award scheme that is appropriately challenging for the students currently on roll. The school has plans to widen the curriculum and improve its flexibility

by providing students with access to e-learning. However, the current number of accessible laptops and range of ICT resources do not support these plans. The curriculum is well balanced between the various areas of learning and there is an appropriately strong emphasis on the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Students have frequent opportunities to learn through practical activities which give them memorable experiences. The provision for physical education is good and the school makes very effective use of local facilities for a wide range of sports.

The expertise of external agencies contributes well to meeting the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs. Students are supported very effectively by clearly written individual educational plans that indicate well-defined learning targets informed by continuous assessments and students' statements. In Key Stage 4, the school makes arrangements for students to attend a local college part time to prepare their transition to further education and promote their independence. The PSHCE programme includes suitable careers education. However, it is not strong enough to support the development of some students' social skills and their awareness of the wider community in all its diversity. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of educational visits to local parks, nature reserves, castles, museums, shops, leisure centres and airports.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. All the required independent school regulations are met. Students feel safe because they are well cared for, as a result of the consistency of approach between residential and school staff in managing their behaviour and providing a safe learning environment. The low occurrence of accidents, incidents and use of physical restraint reflects very good levels of supervision and very effective behaviour management strategies. The school implements its safeguarding and prevention of bullying policies well. All incidents are carefully recorded. Bullying is very rare and the school deals effectively with the few instances of racist comments. Attendance is monitored robustly. The staff are supported well by regular training and up-to-date policies and procedures for child protection, health and safety, fire safety, first aid, behaviour management and anti-bullying.

All staff receive the appropriate level of training in child protection and there is a sufficient number of staff trained in first aid. Rigorous recruitment procedures ensure that all adults working at the school are properly vetted. The required checks are carefully recorded in a single central record. Risk assessments for fire safety, the premises, on-site and off-site activities and individual students are thorough. All of the regulatory fire safety checks are carried out at appropriate intervals and properly logged. Effective monitoring ensures that all policies and procedures are implemented consistently most of the time. However, a few occasional minor slips in the implementation of recording procedures are not always picked up, and this is why this area of the provision is not outstanding. Also, while students are taught about road, water and internet safety, their ability to keep themselves and others safe is not further extended. For example, they have not had any training in first aid, food hygiene and safety in the community. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through PSHCE and access to a wide range of physical activities, as well as fruit and water.

### **Leadership and management**

**Good**

Leadership and management are good and enable students to achieve well. They are not outstanding because students' behaviour and personal development are only adequate and there is further action to take to secure outstanding achievement. The proprietors ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met and that the premises provide effective and safe teaching accommodation. They also see that parents, carers, placing authorities and others receive the full range of information to which they are entitled. The complaints procedure meets requirements. The senior leaders ensure that the school creates a calm and nurturing ethos in which students can re-engage with education and flourish. They engage parents, carers, placing

authorities and external agencies in close partnerships to promote students' good academic progress and welfare. Good coordination between the work of school and residential staff ensures that the provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Placing authorities express a high level of satisfaction with the school. The headteacher has taken very effective action to improve the quality of education and the teaching and curriculum are good. Self-evaluation is accurate and supported by a useful management plan to further improve the educational provision. The school has rightly identified the need to explore more effective strategies to improve the attendance of all students and extend their social skills and first-hand knowledge of the wider community in all its diversity. There are clear plans in hand to further improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching to help students make outstanding progress. Using the subject expertise that exists within the schools owned by the proprietors to strengthen teachers' knowledge and confidence to teach all subjects is one of the proposals. The staff say they feel well supported in their professional development.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135766
<b>Inspection number</b>	422793
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/6057

This inspection was carried out 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School status</b>	Independent residential special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of full time pupils</b>	1
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	My Choice Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Alex Hyland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annie Murphy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5–6 October 2010

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2013

