

My Choice School-Ocean Pearl

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

Inspection dates	27–28 November 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
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

- The senior leaders have improved the quality of education provided, including teaching, since the last inspection and ensured that most students make good academic progress.
- Students achieve well over time and apply their basic skills in a wide range of interesting and practical contexts.
- The teaching is stimulating and based on high expectations of what students can achieve and a thorough understanding of their aptitudes, needs and interests.
- The curriculum meets students' needs well and supports their personal development very effectively. As a result, students make rapid improvements in both their behaviour and attendance.
- The education and care staff form a cohesive team that successfully creates a nurturing ethos conducive to learning and which safeguards students' welfare, health and safety very effectively.

It is not yet outstanding because

- There is a small proportion of adequate teaching and there are some inconsistencies in lesson planning and in the effectiveness of learning targets set for students.
- Students are not challenged consistently well and are not involved deeply enough in the assessment of their own learning to be able 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.
- Four lessons taught by one teacher were observed. Students were heard reading.
- 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, teacher, 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, placing authorities, carers 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

- Ocean Pearl is a very small independent special school catering for residential students. It provides education for boys and girls aged from 11 to 16 years. It opened in December 2006 and had its last inspection in June 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 complex learning needs. Students typically join the school with a history of disrupted education. Students currently attending the school are 15 years old and in the care of the local authority that places them. They do not have a statement of special educational needs. The school makes use of additional off-site provision to provide part-time vocational courses for some students in Key Stage 4 and for 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 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?

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding and help students to make outstanding progress by:
 - ensuring that, when planning lessons, teachers use the information from individual educational plans more consistently so that students always work towards specific and challenging targets
 - involving students more deeply in the assessment of their own learning and helping them gain a clearer understanding of how they can improve their work through consistent use of curricular targets in lessons and in written feedback
 - implementing plans to develop teachers' expertise and confidence to teach all subject areas, including their skills in assessing students' work precisely against national norms.
- Further widen the curriculum and improve its flexibility by providing students with the equipment and resources needed to access e-learning.
- Further improve the provision for students' personal development by ensuring that students have first-hand experiences of a diversity of beliefs to supplement their theoretical knowledge.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Most students achieve well as a result of good teaching, a good curriculum that is adapted to their needs, a nurturing ethos and good provision for their personal development, welfare, health and safety. Students join the school with literacy and numeracy skills that are low in relation to expectations for their age, having experienced considerable disruption in their schooling and sometimes having been out of education for up to one year. The care and education teams work very closely together to provide a consistent approach to managing students' behaviour and supporting their emotional needs. Thorough initial assessments identify the gaps which students have in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and are used very effectively to draw up clearly written individual education plans. When used well, these plans support teachers' planning so that the work meets students' needs closely. Consequently, most students settle in and re-engage with education swiftly, and make good progress in relation to their starting points. On occasion, when students have joined with extremely challenging behaviours and very complex needs, they have made adequate progress overall in the short time which they spent at the school. Students' achievement is not outstanding because they are not challenged consistently well and are not involved deeply enough in the assessment of their learning.

Students have daily opportunities to apply their basic skills in lessons. They read a variety of texts in several subjects. They apply their ICT, reading, writing and research skills in a range of interesting contexts, including history, geography, citizenship and religious education. For example, they had produced Powerpoint presentations on the Philippines typhoon, the slave trade, Guy Fawkes and Rastafarians. They apply their mathematical skills in practical contexts, for example when purchasing food to cook a meal within a given budget or making models of houses in design and technology. Students make good progress in several subjects including science, where they develop enquiry and analytical skills through stimulating experiments. Students who complete their education at the school succeed in gaining a place at college.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Students' behaviour and personal development are good. The teaching and residential teams work closely together to create a calm atmosphere that is conducive to re-engaging students in education. As a result, students' attendance improves and becomes regular within a short period. Students respond well to the positive working relationships which staff establish with them and their levels of self-confidence and self-esteem increase through use of praise and celebration of their achievements. Students demonstrate great pride in showing their work to visitors and speak confidently about their aspirations. Their behaviour improves significantly and serious behaviour incidents reduce over time, with the very effective support of all staff who follow a consistent approach to managing students' behaviour. Through personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), students gain a good insight into all forms of bullying and understand how conflict can be resolved peacefully. Instances of bullying are rare.

The curriculum and the school's ethos promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students are prepared very effectively for independent living through PSHCE and the curriculum. They develop a strong sense of community by taking on responsibilities, for example cooking meals for staff and students, and laying the table. They practise the art of making general conversation around the dining table and demonstrate good social skills. Students contribute to the wider community by raising funds for charity, for example by selling home-made cakes along with making a Powerpoint presentation on the Philippines typhoon disaster. They learn to appreciate and respect diversity through cultural studies. However, they do not have first-hand practical experience of those with different beliefs to enhance their theoretical knowledge.

Students learn about public institutions through the well-structured PSHCE programme and see them in operation through educational visits and their use of local facilities. The proprietors ensure that, where political opinions are expressed, a balanced view is presented.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good overall and enables students to make good progress. It is not outstanding because there is a small proportion of adequate teaching and there are inconsistencies in lesson planning and in the effectiveness of learning targets set for students. Teachers' high expectations of what students can achieve are based on a thorough understanding of students' current standards of literacy and numeracy and their aptitudes and interests in certain subjects. Teachers very skilfully ensure that students focus on planned work, negotiating boundaries with a successful mix of firmness and flexibility to ensure that students complete tasks which they might otherwise leave unfinished to move on to a preferred activity. Through clear demonstrations and explanations and probing questions, teachers help students to develop a good understanding of the topic studied. Teaching assistants are directed to support and extend students' learning very effectively. By playing the role of peers and working through the same tasks as students, they model the expected standards of work and behaviour. When exchanging exercise books with students upon completion of a task, they enable students to engage productively in peer- and self-assessment and to respond positively to an element of competitiveness. Where the teaching is underpinned by secure subject knowledge, teachers gradually raise the level of difficulty with confidence, resulting in well-paced lessons that challenge students well and sustain their interest. However, where subject knowledge is less secure, the teaching is sometimes adequate rather than good, because teachers are not so skilled in pitching lessons at a sufficiently high level of challenge and not so confident in assessing the level of students' work. Consequently, on occasion, students only make adequate progress. The school has plans in hand to address this issue.

The teaching is supported well by detailed individual education plans that clearly indicate the academic goals towards which each student will work, their behaviour goals, measures put in place to support them and assessment methods to be used to check their progress. However, lesson plans do not always sufficiently take into account the information contained in the individual education plans to focus students' learning on targets that are always specific and measurable. Consequently, students are not challenged consistently well. While students receive useful verbal feedback in lessons, this feedback is not always related explicitly to students' learning targets to involve them more deeply in the assessment of their learning. In addition, although all work is marked, students receive little constructive written feedback. Consequently, they do not have a sufficiently clear picture of how they can improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good, enables students to achieve well and prepares them well for their future. Its breadth encompasses all the required areas of learning, with a great emphasis on literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, as well as PSHCE. The provision for science is particularly strong and students report that they enjoy learning through exciting experiments, for example making a model volcano and simulating a volcanic eruption. Students benefit from specialist teaching in music, science and horse-riding and have access to a wide range of sports including swimming. The curriculum is constructed around an accredited unit award scheme that serves the needs of the students who are admitted to the school. Where students show the ability to gain GCSE qualifications, they are prepared very effectively to reach the standards required to take GCSE courses at local colleges. The school has plans to further widen the curriculum and improve its flexibility by providing students with access to e-learning. However, there is not a sufficient number of laptops or wide enough range of ICT resources to implement this plan. The provision for PSHCE is thoughtfully tailored to meet students' individual needs and benefits from links with specialist outside agencies. The programme of careers education is effective in supporting students

to make informed choices about their future. The curriculum is enhanced by a reasonably wide range of educational visits. However, these are only adequate in supporting students' awareness of cultural and religious diversity.

The curriculum is modified very effectively to meet the varying needs of individual students while maintaining a good level of challenge, which is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Where students have had no success in engaging with education prior to joining the school, they begin with a programme that focuses on building positive relationships with the teaching staff. Subsequently, the curriculum is centred on providing them with life and workplace skills. An emphasis on outdoor learning, educational visits and project work helps students to engage swiftly in learning and to cope with a more formal timetable. Long- and medium-term plans clearly show how students will progress in their learning and are sufficiently detailed to support the teaching. Well-written and comprehensive individual education plans map out students' personalised learning programmes very effectively and are reviewed frequently.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The good provision for students' welfare, health and safety is supported by a strong commitment to staff training and clearly written policies and procedures that are easy to follow. All the regulations for independent schools are met. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and all the required vetting checks are recorded properly in a single central register. All staff receive training in child protection to appropriate standards and at the required intervals, and in behaviour management and the use of restraint. A high number are trained in first aid, health and safety and food hygiene. In addition, staff receive specialist training in a wide range of topics that support them extremely well in their pastoral care. Behaviour incidents and instances of bullying are dealt with very effectively and recorded in detail. This information is analysed by the senior leaders to identify patterns and improve systems. Assessments of the particular risks posed to each individual student are carried out carefully before any on-site or off-site activity. All the fire safety checks are logged appropriately. The school has rightly identified that the recording of accidents needs improvement to facilitate the monitoring of the effectiveness of first aid procedures. Good levels of supervision ensure few accidents occur. Attendance is monitored robustly. Students feel safe and well cared for. They undertake extensive work on learning about bullying. They learn to keep safe near the water, on the road and when using tools and equipment, including computers. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through PSHCE and to eat healthily through cooking.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good and enable students to achieve well. They are not outstanding because more work is required to secure outstanding achievement. The senior leaders ensure that the school creates a calm and nurturing ethos in which students can settle and re-engage swiftly with education. They establish close partnerships with parents, carers, placing authorities and external agencies to promote students' good academic progress and welfare. The headteacher has improved the quality of education since the last inspection, and the teaching and curriculum are good. Well-coordinated work between the teaching and care teams results in good provision for students' welfare, health and safety. Self-evaluation is accurate and further improvements are planned methodically. The correct priorities have been identified to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching to help students make outstanding progress. The staff say that they feel well supported in their professional development.

The proprietors ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met and that the premises provide effective and safe teaching accommodation. Parents, carers and placing authorities receive the full range of information to which they are entitled and are satisfied with the quality of communication with the school. The complaints procedure meets requirements.

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

Unique reference number	135111
Inspection number	422778
DfE registration number	938/6272

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.

Type of school	Secondary school
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	11–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	My Choice Ltd
Chair	Alex Hyland
Headteacher	Annie Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 June 2010

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