

Hythe House Education

19 Marine Parade, Sheerness, Kent ME12 2AP

Inspection dates 3–4 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school.

- Leaders and those responsible for governance have high expectations of what staff and students should achieve. As a result, the school continues to improve.
- The leaders and proprietors have ensured that all the independent school standards continue to be met.
- Teaching is good and staff/student relationships are strong, so that students achieve well and make good progress once they are settled in.
- Effective leadership has ensured that teachers plan interesting activities where students enjoy their learning.
- The school offers a secure environment in which the students are able to relax, knowing that they are with adults in whom they trust.
- Students feel safe, behave very well and have very good attitudes to learning. Their attendance is excellent.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Staff are not always quick enough to recognise and intervene when students are experiencing difficulties with their learning.
- Teachers do not always present activities clearly so that students understand their individual targets or what they have to do next to achieve success.
- The school does not always provide clear reports about students' progress to those responsible for governance. As a result, this slows down their decision making.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed parts of four lessons and was accompanied by the headteacher on two of the observations.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, the headteacher, staff with additional responsibilities, carers and students.
- In addition to observing lessons, the inspector looked at the work in students' books and considered information provided by the school about students' attainment and progress.
- The inspector examined documents giving details of the school's evaluation of its performance and plans for future developments. He also checked arrangements to keep students safe and details about the range of subjects and activities that students are taught.
- The inspector carried out visual and documentary checks to ascertain that the school complies with the independent school standards, such as details of the complaints procedures.
- The inspector took into account the opinions expressed by staff in five inspection questionnaires.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to trigger an analysis.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hythe House Education is an independent day special school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Some students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- All students are in the care of local authorities and live in foster placements that are arranged by the parent company Hythe House Support. Placements are funded by local authorities, mainly Greenwich, Kent and Medway.
- Prior to joining the school, most students have not attended school for significant periods of time.
- Five students currently attend the school on a full-time basis. There are two teachers, including the headteacher, both of whom hold senior leadership responsibilities.
- The school makes use of Sittingbourne Leisure Centre to provide physical education. Students do not attend any alternative provision.
- The five proprietors are trading as a limited company. One proprietor acts as the school's headteacher. Although there is no formal governing body, all the proprietors are responsible for the school's governance.
- There are no middle leaders in the school.
- The school is located in a spacious three-storey detached house in Sheerness, on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent. The school opened in September 2003.
- The school aims to offer a broad and balanced curriculum which enables students to experience a rewarding level of achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of students by making sure that:
 - classroom staff intervene quickly to support students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning
 - students always have a clear understanding of their individual targets or the next steps they need to take in order to achieve success
 - lesson activities are always well structured to meet the needs of all students.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - reports to those responsible for governance are more user-friendly so that they can more easily make the right decisions to bring about improvements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school leaders expect and achieve good performance from everyone in the school, and this has resulted in the students' good academic and personal development. The proprietors have ensured that all the independent school standards are met, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- The headteacher and proprietors, through well-established routines and procedures, understand well what makes each student tick, and what the school needs to do to improve further.
- The arrangements and procedures for ensuring students' safety are watertight and fully meet requirements. Staff receive frequent updating on all aspects of safeguarding, including, for example, the physical management of students and the appointment of trustworthy staff. The proprietors and headteacher keep these arrangements under constant review.
- The leaders make sure that the students experience a range of learning activities that tightly matches their individual needs, interests and capabilities, although still based on similar subjects as they would receive in a mainstream school. This helps them quickly adapt if they move on to a mainstream school or college.
- The students study a broad range of subjects that includes science, technology and creativity. The leaders make a priority of improving the students' communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills – areas that are exceedingly important for their future success and where they are most likely to have fallen behind.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 appropriately undertake GCSE and Entry-level examination courses. The school offers early entry where this is appropriate. Students are prepared well to move on to the next stage of their lives by the provision of suitable information about future careers and opportunities for further education.
- The students' timetables are skilfully constructed so that they cleverly knit together academic subjects with a well-thought-out programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHE). In this way students receive constant, clear messages that support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them well for their future lives.
- The leaders have a good understanding of how well staff are performing through regular visits to classrooms, lesson observations and appraisal sessions. The headteacher offers other staff opportunities to visit his own lessons so that he can model expert practice. This is in order to improve teaching and remove any inconsistencies that may hold back progress.
- The school's recording processes give the staff the essential information they need to set work at the right level for each student. However, the records are not always sufficiently user-friendly. As a result, those responsible for governance cannot easily get a clear picture of achievement.
- The school accommodation offers the students a safe and pleasant place in which to learn. There is plenty of classroom space, especially for the current number of students. Staff make good use of specialist rooms for the teaching of art, design and technology, computer skills and art.
- The leaders arrange weekly physical education, with a good variety of choices of activity, for all students at the local sports facilities. Within the school, the students speak well of the space provided for indoor games and there is a small, but sufficient, space outdoors for relaxation and recreation.
- The leaders make certain that all students have equal opportunities to succeed within the context of their past experience of schooling. Through its policies and procedures, all staff are trained and committed to tackling discrimination in any form.
- The leaders make available all the required information for parents, carers and others on the school's website or in the prospectus. The school's complaints policy meets requirements and is well publicised. The leaders' relationship with parents and carers is very strong. All students live in foster placements that are arranged by the parent company, so parents and carers have multiple opportunities to communicate with the school and they use these well.
- There is a very effective day book system for each student which is completed each day by carers and the school. The book gives a roundup of the day's events and any feedback which may be helpful to support the student. This gives both the school and home a rounded view of whether a student needs additional help.
- The carers who were interviewed said, 'We have a very good relationship with the school and the headteacher. Everyone, including the kids, like him and trust him.'
- **The governance of the school:**
 - continues to make sure that all the independent school standards are met, including those related to

the suitability and adequacy of the premises and accommodation, the quality of information for parents, and the procedure for handling complaints

challenges and supports the school well so that it continues to improve

knows about how performance management, including how well teachers are performing and what is done to improve or reward them as may be required

is committed to keeping a close eye on the performance of staff and students, including examining the school's data, so that it can identify the most pressing priorities for improvement in its development planning

makes sure that everyone at the school is kept safe, for example through maintaining effective policies and procedures

makes sure that the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well maintained, including the promotion of British values and procedures to deal with any form of extremism

makes sure that financial resources are used efficiently to achieve the best outcomes for the students.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good and begins to improve from the day they join the school. This improvement has a very positive effect on learning and achievement. Students say, 'It's a brilliant school. It gives you that last chance to sort yourself out. And we've taken it.'
- Students behave well in most lessons and around the school, and their attendance is very high and well above national averages. One student, speaking for others, said, 'This is the best school I've been in. I've stayed here the longest and it's where I have behaved the best.'
- A major factor in the good behaviour and high attendance is the excellent collaboration between the school and families, especially over the personal and therapeutic ingredients of the school's programmes.
- All students have had a poor experience of education in the past, and arrive at the school lacking resilience and confidence in their capacity to learn. With few exceptions, all students find their feet quickly in the secure, relaxed but consistent atmosphere of the school and get back on track with their studies.
- They start to enjoy coming to school, where they experience frequent success at a pace that is right for them. They treat the school environment with respect. Their punctuality and attendance shoot up and in nearly all cases attendance is virtually 100%. Students say they feel utterly safe and that bullying is unheard of. Exclusions are extremely rare.
- When students are learning in lessons, their behaviour is good, and often excellent. Students talk enthusiastically about what they have learned, speak up quickly in response to questions from staff and engage eagerly in tasks that interest them. They say that they often correct each other if they hear someone being impolite.
- The staff generally pay close attention to each individual's needs and moods in the small groups and step in quickly as necessary. Occasionally classroom staff are too slow to pick up on a student who finds learning difficult, or do not structure the lesson activities sufficiently well to retain the students' interest. This unsettles the students and sometimes their behaviour deteriorates.
- The students develop a close and trusting bond with staff members. In lessons they feel able to take risks when responding to tasks and not to worry about making mistakes or being ridiculed. This helps them move on quickly and develop their own ways and methods of learning which will stand them in good stead in later life.
- Staff consistently operate a reward system when students have done well. The rewards, such as choices of venues for educational visits, are valued greatly by the students. The system is a key motivator for students to work hard. Students say this system is fair and approve of it.
- Students are encouraged to take time out if they feel wound up and to develop their own ways of coping with difficult situations. As a consequence, there are very few times when lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour and students could only remember one major incident that occurred five months previously.
- The carers who were interviewed said, 'My daughter had hit rock bottom before she came here, ending up with her in hospital. This place is a Godsend – a real success and it's such a relief not to have the police knocking on the door. The school has turned her around completely.'
- Staff make very detailed notes of any incidents that arise and how they were handled. The leaders analyse these records closely in order to learn why the incident occurred, and to avoid any re-occurrence. For all students, the records show a dramatic decrease in the number of incidents over time.
- The school provides many opportunities for students to develop a good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They learn to tolerate and respect other people's points of view and beliefs

through daily discussions. They come to be fascinated with the world around them through creative arts and imaginative writing. They develop empathy for victims and a sense of right and wrong through responding to the high standards of behaviour consistently expected of them.

- Students come to appreciate other cultures through the termly theme weeks on cultural and religious understanding. In the weekly 'values' sessions, they gain insight and develop tolerance to other forms of difference, such as race, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Students learn to be of service to others, for example by raising funds for different charities and baking buns to be sold for Red Nose Day.
- All these activities and topics promote British values – including democracy and the rule of law – and prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- Staff members have a good understanding of the need to avoid the promotion of any partisan political views in any school activity, so that all the independent school standards for this aspect are met.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Staff provide high levels of supervision that include teaching one to one or in very small groups. The students say, 'If you're in trouble or have a personal problem, you can talk to any member of staff. They're very good at listening and giving you advice.'
- No swearing or derogatory language was heard during the inspection, and the students and carers say that the use of racist or homophobic words is very rare. They say that if this occurs then staff pick them up very quickly.
- The parent company makes sure that all the appropriate arrangements are in place to recruit and appoint trustworthy staff who are suitable to work with children.
- The proprietors make sure that all members of staff receive training to the required levels in child protection, as well as in first aid and fire safety. There are detailed and comprehensive policies in place for managing behaviour, the prevention of bullying and all aspects of health and safety. Through regular training and monitoring, the school makes certain that policies and procedures are implemented consistently.
- The leaders, together with external qualified consultants, carry out regular, routine checks on the premises, including all aspects of fire safety. The staff keep the building secure at all times and access is strictly controlled, so that all the independent school standards for this aspect are met.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Students' workbooks, the school's information and observations in lessons show that teaching in all subjects across the school, including in literacy, reading and mathematics, is good over time. In this way, students make good progress with their learning.
- In the classrooms, the staff skilfully create a climate of genuine trust between themselves and the students. This relaxes the students so that they settle down quickly, concentrate hard and get on with their work.
- Teachers work well with students either one to one or in small groups. They provide a customised timetable for each student, carefully planned so that they can quickly catch up in their basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy.
- Each year, the school produces individual education and behaviour plans that generate targets for achievement in English and mathematics which are shared with students and parents or carers. These targets are useful during regular reviews of students' progress in each subject.
- The school sets individual targets in priority skills such as reading and number. However, some students do not have clear understanding of what these are. This is because the targets are not reinforced by all staff throughout the school day, and because written feedback does not always indicate to students what their next steps in learning should be. This holds back their progress.
- In lessons, there is often very skilful questioning and discussion that put students at ease, support the students' efforts and help the teacher to check whether the student has 'got it'. This assists the students to make fast progress.
- Teachers assess students' work daily and make detailed records of the progress made. There is some good analysis of how well the different groups are doing in the school, although not always in user-friendly language.
- The school does well in smoothing the pathway back to mainstream schools, where possible, or on to college. Students receive good careers advice from the local service. Leaders have ensured all the independent school standards for teaching and assessment are met.

The achievement of students**is good**

- The school's records show that, from often low starting points, all students make good progress in all their subjects, including in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. This stands them in good stead for the future. Leaders have ensured all requirements for this aspect, are met.
- The improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning have a significant impact upon the students' achievement, and ultimately on their life chances. Students begin to raise their aspirations. In discussion with the inspector, they said that they were aiming to be a motor engineer, a secretary, a nursery teacher and a catering manager.
- The school makes available a good, relevant range of materials and teaching strategies in literacy and communication so that students quickly begin to recover their self-confidence and improve in this area. Throughout the day, students have regular opportunities for discussions, for writing and for reading silently and out loud.
- The school uses a very good variety of approaches that help students to improve their mathematical skills and abilities. The school gives a priority to raising students' confidence so that the students accept new mathematical challenges readily. In this way they realise they can make improvements and develop, for example by learning new calculations.
- In the occasional lesson, progress is held back because of inconsistencies in teaching. However, there is no discernible difference between the achievements of the different groups in the school, including those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is because educational support is highly individualised in the very small teaching groups.
- The most able students achieve well because of the individualised programmes they pursue, receiving additional work at a higher level promptly where this is appropriate.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	134606
Inspection number	454271
DfE registration number	886/6107

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Day special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of students	11–16 years
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	5
Number of part time students	0
Proprietor	Hythe House Support Ltd
Chair	Robert Duffy
Headteacher	Robert Duffy
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 November 2011
Annual fees (day students)	£25,577
Telephone number	01795 581006
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