

Macintyre School

Leighton Road, Aylesbury, HP22 4PA

Inspection dates 17–19 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Directors of the Macintyre charity have not monitored the school closely enough and did not act effectively to prevent the decline of its performance since the last inspection.
- Too much teaching requires improvement. Recent improvements to practice have not had enough time to have an impact on students' learning. Some students do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Until recently, school leaders have not had a clear enough picture of students' abilities. As a result, they have not been able to measure their progress accurately.
- Provision for sixth form students requires improvement. There is no coherent strategic plan tailored to the needs and abilities of students in this part of the school.
- Arrangements for the governance of the school are not sufficiently systematic or rigorous. Directors overseeing the school do not have enough expertise in education to challenge the school and ensure its good performance.

The school has the following strengths

- The current Principal has completely overhauled systems in the school. She has focused wholeheartedly on improving teaching and has restored staff morale.
- Senior and middle leaders are beginning to develop their roles and drive forward learning.
- Students benefit from the dedication of committed staff who place students' needs and well-being at the heart of their work.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Students' challenging behaviour, complex needs and safety are managed effectively.
- Students respond well in lessons and are keen to learn.
- The range of subjects taught (curriculum) is a strength of the school. Exciting topics provide a broad range of experiences and life skills for students.

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

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed teaching in all classes, accompanied by the Principal. The inspector also made shorter visits to classes, accompanied by the interim deputy principal.
- The inspector met with school leaders, teachers and learning support assistants, a director of the charity, and spoke with two parents on the telephone.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector took account of the 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector checked the school's documentation and policies, including those relating to safeguarding, the curriculum, monitoring of teaching, current assessment of students' progress and records of directors' meetings.
- The inspector scrutinised examples of students' work and records of their progress in their folders.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Macintyre School is an independent special school, catering for up to 45 students with severe learning difficulties and autism. It is part of the Macintyre charity.
- There are currently 41 students on roll.
- The school aims to 'support young people in acquiring skills and experience so that they may take their rightful place in society as valued and contributing members'.
- Very nearly all the students are residential and live in the children's homes on site or in a satellite children's home in Leighton Buzzard. All have statements of special educational needs or education health care plans.
- The majority of students are looked after by the local authority and eligible for additional funding from the pupil premium. Sixteen local authorities place students in the school. Some local authorities retain the pupil premium funding.
- The majority of students are boys. Students are from a range of ethnic groups.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The Principal was appointed in July 2014. An interim deputy principal was appointed in January 2015. The school was previously inspected in November 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all is good, and is more outstanding, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use information about students' abilities and previous learning to set more ambitious targets
 - make sure that students' targets are clear and repeated to students during lessons, so that they know exactly what they are aiming for
 - praise and reward students by referring directly and explicitly to their targets
 - make effective use of techniques to support and build on students' vocal and non-verbal communication.
- Improve achievement by:
 - tracking students' progress carefully and making sure that targets are based on what the students know, understand and can do
 - ensuring that more ambitious targets are set for more-able students
 - establishing the new sixth form group, ensuring that appropriate targets in basic skills and communication are set for all students.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring that the board of directors overseeing the performance of the school has sufficient expertise in education and that the directors maintain a close focus on the quality of teaching and learning
 - making sure that those governing the school carry out all their statutory duties
 - providing time and training for the new team of senior and middle leaders to ensure that the workload is shared
 - providing professional development and training for teachers and teaching assistants, including links with good and outstanding schools
 - planning strategically for the sixth form provision.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Since the previous inspection, directors of the charity did not monitor the school closely enough. As a result, leadership declined in effectiveness, the overall performance of the school deteriorated and was no longer outstanding.
- Until recently, school leaders did not have accurate information about students' abilities and how well students were progressing. The school's systems for tracking students' progress were not being effectively used to set appropriate targets.
- Teachers and learning support assistants have not had sufficient advice or training about how to improve their practice. As a result, teaching is not consistently good across the school and effective strategies to improve students' learning are not shared systematically.
- The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders are in the early stages of their development and are not yet having enough impact on standards. Responsibilities for improving teaching and learning have not been shared with other leaders in the school.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Plans to support students with their next steps are not sufficiently systematic or strategic.
- The appointment of the Principal, in July 2014, has brought much needed drive and ambition to the school. In a very short time, teaching has improved and other leaders have stepped up to make a good start on key improvements to the curriculum and assessment systems.
- The Principal and school leaders rightly say that they had to 'start from scratch'. Systems have been overhauled, the different services have been united and there has been a strong focus on teaching and learning. As a result, teaching has been revitalised and staff morale has been restored. The Principal's clear vision and the establishment of supportive working relationships are turning round the previous decline in the school's performance.
- Staff performance is now being monitored closely. The Principal has reviewed teaching, provided useful feedback and introduced more effective strategies to improve students' communication. Although not yet consistent across the school, there are tangible examples of better teaching leading to improved achievement.
- The curriculum is a real strength of the school. School leaders have rewritten the curriculum areas around exciting topics. There is an appropriate focus on physical education and the arts to support students' sensory needs. Students do not experience any discrimination because of their complex needs. Equality of opportunity is guaranteed because staff do all they can to enable students to experience a wealth of activities, including work experience, horse riding, skiing and swimming.
- British values are keenly promoted throughout the curriculum, including the establishment of a democratically elected school council, student-led charity projects, examples of art work, and participation in competitions. During the inspection, students were learning about the tradition of St Patrick's Day, creating decorated shamrocks in their art lesson and making the traditional colcannon potato dish in their cookery session. Students play an active part in the village. They visit the library and contribute to the village fete, helping to promote good relations in the local community.
- Students have many opportunities to gain experience of a range of cultures and religious faiths. For example, students acted out a Jewish wedding, learning key words in the original language and acting out the tradition of breaking a glass for good luck. Students' spiritual development is encouraged through celebratory assemblies, performances and quiet moments in classroom areas when students may wish to be alone and reflective.
- Care is taken to ensure that transitions between key stages are well managed. However, school leaders have identified that more needs to be done to meet the different needs of older students. Leaders have recognised that, in some cases, there is not enough challenge and long-term planning for older students.
- The majority of students are eligible for the pupil premium. However, the school does not receive funding for every student, as some local authorities choose to retain the pupil premium as a contribution to the school fees. School leaders have put together a plan for spending and have begun to examine the impact spending has on students' progress. However, it is too early to say how effectively the money is being spent for each student.
- The school communicates well with parents, carers and local authorities who place students at the school. Parents who spoke to the inspector said that they were pleased to receive regular reports about their children and they find the Principal approachable and receptive to their concerns.
- School leaders rightly treat safeguarding as a top priority. All statutory requirements are met. Leaders

have an open relationship with the local authority safeguarding team. Training for staff is up to date and taken seriously.

■ The governance of the school:

The current arrangements for governance of the school are not effective. Although members of the charity take an active interest in the school, there is not a dedicated group of people holding the school to account or evaluating its performance critically. Directors were not quick enough to spot weaknesses in the previous leadership of the school and lacked the necessary understanding to identify shortfalls in assessment and achievement. Not enough was done to ensure that succession planning was in place when key staff left the school. As a result, weaknesses in leadership grew, staff lost confidence and the school's performance declined.

However, directors took some decisive action to arrest further decline in the school's performance. Key staff were appointed to lead the school in the interim period before the current Principal's appointment. Three members of the charity visit the school regularly and provide support. The Principal feels that she is personally held to account for her work and that she is challenged. She provides reports about teaching, the pupil premium, achievement and staff appraisal for directors, but there is limited evidence that these reports are systematically evaluated or questioned. Evidence of directors' evaluation of the school is patchy and focuses on the children's homes and care rather than ensuring that there is equal focus on teaching and learning in the school.

In January 2015, a decision was made to set up a Quality Board to oversee the work of the school, and directors have recognised that it would make sense to appoint members with relevant education experience. This is an appropriate course of action. However, at the time of the inspection, the first meeting of the board had not yet taken place.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. School leaders can identify students whose behaviour has improved over time as a result of carefully planned support and care.
- Students at the school are not capable of deliberate bullying. The school ensures that students are grouped in order to minimise distress or discomfort with each other. Where appropriate, staff encourage students to form friendships and bonds with each other.
- Students are supported well to make positive choices if they are capable of doing so. Thoughtful support for behaviour helps to alleviate students' anxiety and de-escalate any potential risk of harm.
- Relationships between staff and students are warm. Students clearly appreciate the work staff do to support them and express this in smiles, vocalisation and genuine affection. For some students it is clear that they are becoming more used to being with each other in classes and groups.
- Transitions between activities are managed well. Staff plan these carefully and, in the most successful cases, prepare the students well by involving them in preparing, such as helping to pack up, amending the visual timetables, packing equipment for a trip and choosing snacks and drinks. In this way, students approach change in a controlled and calm way, while learning to manage their feelings and behaviour.
- As a result of continued training for staff in de-escalation strategies, incidents requiring restrictive physical intervention have reduced. The school's records show that incidents of seclusion are only ever used for very limited times when the students are at risk of serious harm or danger. Incidents are recorded in minute detail, scrupulously checked and investigated by the Principal. Such incidents have reduced in number since the beginning of the school year.
- The school makes effective use of its resources to soothe students' anxieties, such as the ball pools in classrooms, quiet areas and safe outdoor spaces.
- Behaviour support plans are thorough and provide teachers with helpful strategies to manage challenging behaviour. The behaviour support team provides teachers with valuable guidance about the best strategies to manage students' difficulties.
- Students are keen to learn. They clearly understand that school is important and that lessons are for learning. When the teaching is effective, and when teachers respond swiftly to their needs, students are enthusiastic. They know their targets and want to achieve them. Most try hard with activities and show impressive patience and persistence with difficult tasks.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because, in a very few cases, expectations of students' behaviour are not high enough. For example, a very few more-able students are given too much leeway about choosing to comply or not to comply with activities or instructions when they are capable of more resilience.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Procedures for safer recruitment of staff are followed assiduously. The school's culture is student-centred, so staff are fearless about reporting concerns in the best interests of students' safety and well-being.
- Risk assessments for activities are thorough and take full account of students' needs and capabilities.
- Staff-to-student ratios are carefully planned, with all students receiving one-to-one support and a few receiving two-to-one support for their needs. Students are not left unsupervised. Even when the students require some time to themselves, staff maintain a watchful eye and are ready to support, console or move on to the next activity when ready.
- The school site is secure and well maintained. The Principal introduced an unlocked door policy, which at first met with some resistance. However, the policy has not put vulnerable students at risk because they are well supervised and supported. Furthermore, an increasing number of students are now able to manage movement around the building independently, taking responsibility for moving from room to room, easing anxieties and gaining confidence. This prepares them well for the next stage in their education and lives.
- The school maintains good relationships with the local authority. Concerns are passed promptly to children's services and the school's work with other agencies is well organised and focused on the needs of the students.
- Safety is not outstanding because some of the school's record keeping, while comprehensive, is not organised student by student. As a result, it is more difficult for school leaders to make best use of chronological accounts of incidents to identify patterns and take preventative action.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Recent improvements to teaching have not had enough time to make an impact on students' achievement in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Not all teaching is consistently good and not enough is outstanding.
- Teachers' plans show the individual targets for each student. However, not all teachers make consistently effective use of strategies to support communication with students, such as signing, symbols and visual reminders. As a result, it is not always made clear to students what they will be learning, the point they have reached in the lesson and what they have to do to meet their targets.
- Teachers praise students warmly for their involvement and cooperation. However, there is not enough explicit praise to help students know exactly what they have done well.
- In a few cases, teachers miss opportunities to reinforce students' communication. Some teachers and learning support assistants do not talk enough to more-able students about their learning. They, therefore, miss out on acquiring more vocabulary and opportunities to repeat and echo sentences.
- In more effective lessons, teachers plan exciting activities that are designed to stimulate students and support them with developing all their skills, using the newly improved curriculum. In these lessons, teachers communicate targets clearly and remind students frequently through the lesson with a well-chosen range of visual clues and resources. For example, in one lesson observed during the inspection, the teacher skilfully wove students' targets together through a story about the Buddha. Students listened to each other, read sentences and used the pictures to work out the story. They then moved to a calming meditation session, which promoted their physical, sensory and spiritual awareness.
- Students are encouraged to read and enjoy stories. Art lessons support students' creativity and also their ability to make marks and control their writing. Some successful teaching combines reading and number skills with practical activities. For example, in one class, students used the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as a recipe for a smoothie milkshake. Students were encouraged to read the relevant part of the story, select the right number of fruits, cut the fruit carefully, while discussing colour and the number of pieces.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' attainment at all stages of their education is below that of students in mainstream or other special schools because of their severe and complex needs. Not all students make good enough progress from their starting points.
- Until recently, systems to measure and track students' progress were not effective. There were gaps in assessment for some students, so that their ability was unclear. In a few cases, previous assessments in

communication, reading, writing and mathematics were not accurate, so it was hard for school leaders to gauge progress accurately.

- School leaders have now established a more accurate system to assess current students and new entrants to the school. Each area of the curriculum is now broken down into targets that relate to steps of progress, so it is much clearer how well students are doing in each area, including communication, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Since the beginning of the year, teachers and teaching assistants record students' progress during lessons on well-designed tracking sheets. This enables teachers and leaders to identify where students are developing skills, managing anxieties and controlling their responses more consistently.
- It is early days with the new system, but lesson observations, the latest collection of data and students' education plans show that all students are making progress in communication, mathematics, reading and writing from their starting points, and that their rates of progress are catching up with rates of progress nationally.
- Leaders have correctly identified that their next step is to establish what constitutes good or better progress and adjust targets for more-able students. Expectations of more-able students are not high enough. In some cases, their current rates of progress are accelerating more rapidly than others, demonstrating that improvements to teaching are having a positive impact and that more could have been expected of them in the first place.
- School leaders are able to show that most students make progress with their behavioural targets. For example, an increasing number of students are able to sit at a table, work alongside each other, and also remember skills such as handing out resources, listening to each other and sustaining their concentration on one task.
- The majority of students are disadvantaged and eligible for additional funding from the pupil premium. Their rates of progress are in line with, or better than, others in the school, but below those of other students nationally.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- There are similar weaknesses in the teaching and achievement in the sixth form as there are in the rest of the school. There is not a clear strategy for the leadership of the sixth form. Plans to ensure that students are well prepared for their next steps are not sufficiently systematic.
- At the time of the inspection, many students of sixth form age were taught in mixed age groups alongside younger students. While this might be helpful in terms of students' ability and behavioural needs, school leaders have rightly recognised that more needs to be done to prepare students for later life and that being grouped discretely would lead to better outcomes.
- Teaching is not consistently good for older students. In a few cases, their targets are not sufficiently ambitious, which limits their progress. For some students, there is not enough focus on improving communication and developing basic skills.
- The curriculum rightly focuses on work experience and preparation for life beyond school. Students benefit from a rich diet of trips, visits and activities. The curriculum progresses well from the lower year groups and builds on previous learning.
- Where students are able to make choices, they are provided with good guidance about their futures and clear plans to support them are put in place. For example, one student had a long-term ambition to work in a cake shop. Through the planned curriculum, opportunities were made for more work experience baking and serving cakes. Now that the student has left the school, she has achieved her ambition. However, planning for all students' futures is not sufficiently systematic across the school.
- Behaviour and safety are good in the sixth form. Support plans are adapted to take into account increased maturity and changes to health and well-being.
- Leadership of the sixth form is underdeveloped. The new leader for the sixth form has clear ideas and experience of preparing students for transitions. He has built strong links with local resources to provide work experience outside the school. However, planning for the sixth form is in its infancy and not enough attention has been paid to increasing students' rates of progress and ensuring that plans for all students' futures are established early enough.

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	110564
Inspection number	455485
DfE registration number	825/6011

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	Secondary
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	17
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	38
Proprietor	The MacIntyre Trust
Chair	Bill Mumford
Headteacher	Kerry Harris
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 November 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,136
Annual fees (boarders)	£185,000
Telephone number	01296 681274
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