

Inspection of My Choice School-Ocean Pearl

2 Yeomans Nursery, Warningcamp, Arundel BN18 9QY

Inspection dates: 19–21 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' opinions matter. They are encouraged to say what they think. Most feel safe and secure to do so. When pupils struggle to do what is asked of them, adults are patient. Pupils are given space and time to calm down, benefiting from the fresh air in the attractive rural site.

Some pupils have been, and remain, unsettled by the high turnover of staff. Pupils recognise that leaders are trying to do what is right, but some feel angry and frustrated by the uncertainty of change.

Most pupils can describe a positive difference the school has made for them. But some perceptively feel that with the right help they could do even better. We agree. The school wants the best for pupils, which is why leaders are making changes.

Following a rocky period, the school's culture has shifted. In terms of pupils' behaviour, this change is for the better, although not all pupils are convinced. It is true that some pupils' behaviour still sometimes stops others learning. On the other hand, the recent whole-school trip to Arundel Castle was a great success. There is no problem with physical bullying, although some pupils are at times verbally aggressive to others.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

This school has been through massive change. None of the current staff team have worked there for very long. Pupils that attend this school have usually had traumatic and turbulent lives. It takes some pupils a long time to build relationships and begin to trust new adults in school.

This school has turned a corner, but there is more to do to establish the culture and climate that leaders want.

Leaders have introduced a new ethos in managing pupils' behaviour. The approach is less punitive than in the past. It is evidently leading to improvements in the majority of pupils' behaviour. Some staff are on board with this method, although some have doubts. It is not yet embedded to the point where all adults reliably reinforce appropriate boundaries, such as pupils' use of mobile phones.

Close supervision of pupils means that any bullying behaviour is quickly identified. However, aggressive and intimidating verbal behaviour from a few pupils sometimes goes unchecked.

The school aims to equip pupils with skills and aptitudes to 'be productive and involved citizens'. Leaders want pupils who have been completely switched off school to 'love learning' because 'it matters'.

However, the curriculum is not designed as specifically as it could be with the social,

emotional and mental health needs of pupils in mind.

Many pupils relish the opportunities for music and physical activities. Some pupils struggle to engage in the more-formal activities when there is less of a practical element. These more-formal sessions take up a large proportion of their week.

With a complete staff change in recent months, staff training has focused on safeguarding. Not all staff are as well trained as they should be in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This means that there is sometimes a gap between what pupils' individual plans say about their education and support, and what actually happens on a daily basis.

Staff are patient with pupils and know them well. They use pupils' personal interests in lessons, for example, choosing non-fiction texts about sport. Adults got pupils talking about mathematics by exploring the best available gaming and music deals on 'Black Friday'.

The school recognises the importance of reading. Teachers make sure that even reluctant readers read regularly. However, reading material is not consistently well matched to pupils' abilities. This means that pupils sometimes need significant support to complete a task. The teaching of phonics is not prioritised enough for pupils who struggle to read.

This is a school that cares about, values, respects and nurtures each individual. It does much to promote their personal development. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is responsive to what pupils say or show that they need. A lively and rich assembly programme supports this teaching. Pupils have a pivotal role in deciding the content and leading assemblies. Recent topics include anti-bullying and the 'Stoptober' campaign encouraging giving up smoking. Pupils are proud of their charity fundraising, including the recent 'fairy run'.

Leaders ensure that pupils receive independent careers advice. They do all they can to arrange work experience placements linked to pupils' aspirations. For example, pupils have volunteered at local dogs homes, or experience work in hair and beauty.

Leaders are tenacious in encouraging pupils to attend regularly. Despite this, there are still significant issues with school refusal for a small number of pupils. Leaders have a close eye to what will happen to pupils when they reach the age of 16. Some pupils gain certificates they were unlikely to do before joining the school. On the whole, previous pupils have moved on to meaningful placements post-16, mostly college.

The new headteacher knows what she wants to achieve. The division of responsibility between her and the head of education works well. Together, they have stabilised the school after a tricky period of massive change. They know that there is some way to go to get the school where they want it to be.

The proprietorial body has a realistic understanding of the journey the school has

been on and its current performance. It is wisely investing in strengthening leadership capacity through the appointment of a deputy headteacher. There are adequate arrangements for the oversight of the independent school standards which are all met.

A suitable accessibility plan is in place. Action is taken to improve the school's policies and practices as a result.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are very alert to the risks pupils face. Leaders combine all their safeguarding expertise and knowledge of individual pupils to reduce these risks as much as they can.

The culture is one where safeguarding is the top priority, and everyone is always learning. This means that incidents of any kind are closely analysed to see what might be changed to avoid a repeat. Leaders work closely with other professionals to take a joined-up approach to keep pupils safe. Pupils' views and perceptions are treated with the utmost seriousness in promoting their welfare.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Overall, the curriculum is not as well designed or adapted as it could be, taking account of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders should strengthen curriculum leadership and expertise so that the education offered to pupils is sufficiently well designed and adapted to meet their varied and complex needs. This should be considered to be part of the school's persistent work to improve the attendance of pupils.
- Training for current staff has focused largely on safeguarding. Leaders should also ensure that they develop staff knowledge and understanding of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs, and other SEND. This is to support leaders to embed their intended ethos and approach reliably and consistently.
- On paper, planning for individual pupils' needs is thorough and pays close attention to the requirements of their education, health and care (EHC) plans. However, these individual plans do not translate consistently well to pupils' daily experiences. Leaders should ensure that staff use their developing expertise to improve their classroom practice and better meet pupils' needs to improve pupils' achievement.
- Staff prioritise helping pupils with their reading. However, reading material is not consistently well matched to pupils' abilities. The subject knowledge in phonics, of staff teaching pupils to read, is not as strong as would be helpful to provide the best support for pupils struggling to read fluently. Leaders should ensure that staff have the knowledge and materials they need to teach reading effectively so

that all pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills.

- Leaders are on the way to changing the culture of behaviour management, promoting the climate and atmosphere they desire, but this is still a work in progress. Leaders should persist with renewed confidence that their chosen path is working. They should ensure that all staff take a consistent approach and help reinforce agreed boundaries, so that all pupils are well supported to change their behaviour for the better.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	135111
DfE registration number	938/6272
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10128863
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	My Choice Children's Homes Limited
Chair	Alex Hyland
Headteacher	Jennifer Durlston-Powell
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000
Telephone number	01903 898060
Website	www.my-choice-homes.com/
Email address	a.murphy@my-choice-homes.com
Date of previous inspection	19–21 September 2017

Information about this school

- This school is for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs which lead to them being unable to access or sustain placements in other schools. Most have had significant disruption to, and gaps in, their previous schooling. Most are children looked after and have an EHC plan. Many have attachment and anxiety disorders.
- There has been a significant turnover of leaders and staff since the previous standard inspection on 19–21 September 2017. The headteacher took up post in April 2019. Of the school's three class teachers, the longest-serving teacher has worked at the school for approximately six months. The teacher appointed most recently started 11 days prior to the inspection.

- The head of education oversees educational provision across My Choice schools.
- A very small number of pupils access alternative provision one or two afternoons per week. This is to access 'Fusion tutoring' offered by 'Up-grade Training', which combines martial arts with functional skills.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned in light of whistleblowing concerns it had received about the school. We considered the wider issues raised in this complaint, and one previously received by the DfE, when conducting this inspection.
- We met with a director representing the proprietorial body, the head of education, headteacher, staff and pupils. We also spoke with a social worker.
- To examine the quality of education, we looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). We did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, PSHE and history. To explore each subject, we spoke with the headteacher, teachers and pupils, and examined curriculum plans for the subject. We also looked at pupils' work and other available evidence of their learning and progress. We visited lessons in the subjects being taught during the inspection.
- To review safeguarding, we spoke in detail with leaders and staff about how they implement the school's policies and procedures to protect pupils. We scrutinised records to see how this vital work is carried out in practice. We also spoke with a designated officer for safeguarding from the local authority. The single central record was checked.
- We observed the work of the school throughout the time of the inspection and checked the school's arrangements for meeting the independent school standards. We toured the premises and chatted informally to pupils at breaktimes.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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