

Inspection of My Choice School – Oak House

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

Inspection dates: 25–27 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

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?

The school has a warm, friendly and family feel. There are strong and trusting bonds formed between staff and pupils. Pupils feel happy and safe. They enjoy the opportunity to undertake work experience, such as helping at a local animal sanctuary. They say that they find it very rewarding to work with animals who need their help.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. In lessons pupils behave well and concentrate hard on their learning. Bullying is rare, if it does happen it is dealt with swiftly. Staff help pupils to develop their confidence and belief in their own abilities.

Expectations for pupils' learning are not high enough. Leaders, including the headteacher, are based on different sites. These are some distance from this school. This has meant that some aspects of the school, including how well pupils are learning, have not been well enough monitored. Leaders have started to develop plans to make the necessary improvements to help pupils achieve their best.

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

A key aim of the school is to help pupils with their social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff achieve this aim well. When pupils first arrive at the school, they often have a low self-esteem. Staff use effective strategies to de-escalate any incidents. They gently help pupils to improve their emotional well-being and give them a sense of self-belief. One way that staff do this is through sport. They find the sports that interest pupils and arrange for pupils to try them out. If needed, they arrange for specialist lessons, such as in horse-riding. Gradually pupils start to develop their resilience and become more confident.

The curriculum in PE is well designed. For example, after learning the breaststroke pupils build on these skills to become confident swimming underwater. Gradually pupils become proficient in strokes such as the underwater dolphin stroke. However, the curriculum in other subjects such as English, mathematics and food technology is not so well organised. For example, skills in writing, comprehension, grammar and spelling are not developed in a logical way. This means that pupils do not build on their knowledge well enough over time.

Staff recognise that the use of assessment in the school is not always effective. They are starting to address this. However, currently assessment is not well enough used by staff to plan for pupils' next steps in learning.

Reading is a priority in the school. The school library has a diverse range of factual and fiction books. Some books have been selected because of pupils' specific interests, such as post-modern artists. Staff encourage pupils to read a wide range of books for pleasure. They help pupils to develop the confidence to read aloud to others.

Leaders recognise that pupils have often had negative experiences at their previous schools. There is a focus on developing their sense of enjoyment in the world around them. Pupils talk about things that 'bring them joy', such as the natural environment. In the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum there are many opportunities for pupils to be reflective of their beliefs and values. Pupils learn to accept rules and the structure of school life. Over time they understand the impact of their actions on the lives of others. Pupils behave well and develop positive attitudes to their learning. Staff ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next step in their education, employment or training. The school is proud of the fact that many past pupils have returned back into mainstream schools.

Leaders, including the proprietor, have made sure that the school meets the independent school standards and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. However, leaders acknowledge that improvements need to be made and they are determined to address these. Leaders are in the process of developing a plan of action that will guide the school in making the necessary changes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know pupils well. Every opportunity is taken to make sure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. Staff have thorough safeguarding training which ensures that they are well prepared for any eventuality. Staff are vigilant, they ensure that any concern is reported to the designated safeguarding lead. Leaders work closely with a range of external agencies including social workers. Leaders make sure that pupils learn to look after themselves. For example, they know how to keep themselves safe when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The sequence of learning in some subjects of the curriculum is not clear enough, particularly in English, mathematics and food technology. This means that pupils do not develop their understanding as well as they could. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is clearly planned in these subjects so that pupils gain the knowledge, understanding and skills they need in a logical way.
- Assessment is not always well enough used to check pupils' understanding. The impact of this is that pupils do not embed their knowledge and develop their understanding as well as they could. Teachers need to ensure that assessment is better used to inform the next steps in pupils' learning.
- Leaders plans to improve the school have not been recently updated. As a result, the pace of improvement has slowed. Leaders must develop new plans that identify what actions need to be taken and how the actions will be evaluated.

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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135766 |
| DfE registration number | 845/6057 |
| Local authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 10123987 |
| 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 | 1 |
| Proprietor | My Choice Children's Homes Limited |
| Chair | Alex Hyland |
| Headteacher | Jennifer Durlston Powell |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £45,000 |
| Telephone number | 01444 446920 |
| Website | www.my-choice-homes.com |
| Email address | a.murphy@my-choice-homes.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 16–18 May 2017 |

Information about this school

- The school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, many have had a fragmented and disrupted education in the past. All pupils have an EHC plan or are in the process of obtaining one.
- The headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection. She oversees this school and a school in Arundel where she is based. Her line manager, the Head of Education, also visits this school on a regular basis. There is currently one teacher at this school.
- The school had its last standard inspection on 16–18 May 2017, when it was judged to be good.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.

- I met with the head of education and held telephone conversations with the headteacher and a director from My Choice Children's Homes Ltd.
- Four subjects were selected to look at closely during this inspection, these were English, mathematics, food technology and PE. The deep dives involved a meeting with the teacher who is responsible for all subjects, work scrutiny, lesson visits and discussion with pupils.
- I talked to pupils to gather their views about their learning, behaviour and safety. I also listened to reading.
- Safeguarding arrangements were explored by reviewing safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, talking to staff and pupils and checking the school's single central record. I also met with the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's staff, pupil or parent surveys.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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