

Inspection of MEPA ACADEMY

27 and 29 Earl Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1PF

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 September 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a small school where pupils excel academically and personally. Pupils appreciate the provision of art, dance, drama and music while acknowledging the importance of academic subjects, including English, mathematics and languages. Leaders provide an exceptionally broad, balanced and enriching curriculum.

The school is working hard to further embed the curriculum and develop the vocational provision in performing arts. Leaders have very high expectations. They know the school well and have a clear understanding of where improvements need to be made. Leaders appreciate the need to help pupils make connections within and across subjects.

Pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Behaviour and attitudes are exceptional across the school. Relationships are highly respectful and mutually supportive. Pupils care for one another. Consequently, they are happy and they feel safe. Bullying is extremely rare and quickly dealt with when it does occur.

There are ample opportunities to nurture and develop pupils' interests and talents. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are extensive and well attended. Careers support is personalised, and pupils are well informed and well prepared for further education and future careers. The school provides high-quality pastoral care which supports pupils' health, welfare and well-being.

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

The curriculum is sequential and adaptable. Knowledge and skills are developed with frequent opportunities to revisit content so that pupils deepen their learning. The school is working hard on embedding the curriculum and supporting the development of the BTEC National Diplomas in the performing arts.

Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and experts in their respective fields. Regular professional development ensures that their knowledge is up to date. Lesson planning is well considered and adds detail to the long-term plans accompanying each subject. Pupils are well supported in identifying links within individual subjects. Links across subjects are not so well developed.

Assessment is strong across the school. Written and verbal feedback is regularly provided. This helps pupils appreciate what they need to do to improve. The school is developing systems to monitor pupils' progress in performing arts so that teachers can check improvement. Teachers know their pupils very well and make suitable adjustments to support those who need extra help.

Pupils are positive and committed to the school. This is evident in their very high attendance rates and their positive attitudes to the school and their learning.

Pupils take a pride in their work and their presentation. Exercise books and work folders are kept to a high standard. Subject-specific words are highlighted and emphasised.

Reading and a love of reading are actively promoted within English lessons. The department has set up a school library. Pupils are encouraged to read often. Pupils read in tutor time and value opportunities to discuss their reading and recommend books. Reading books are carefully chosen to match pupils' reading ability and maintain their interest and enjoyment.

The planned programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) covers a broad range of relevant content, including relationships and sex education. It is well considered with themes pursued in an age-appropriate way. Content such as sexuality and consent are sensitively interwoven across the years. Opportunities to explore links across PSHE, assemblies, tutorial time and subjects are missed.

Pupils' moral and cultural knowledge is well supported across a range of subjects. British values are reinforced across the school. Pupils undertake a wide range of enrichment activities, including theatre productions, visits to the town hall and trips to Hever Castle. They also value their leadership roles as school prefects, council members and subject ambassadors.

High-quality careers information, advice and guidance help pupils make decisions about what they want to do in the future. Older pupils spoke knowledgeably about their aspirations. They are well supported to move on to quality courses in highly regarded performing arts colleges. Many receive scholarships to support them.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and well known. They are good attenders and value the help they receive. The small class sizes allow them to receive effective one-to-one support from staff. This ensures that their achievements are similar to that of their peers.

Staff are positive about the leadership of the school. They feel that their workload is managed well through sharing resources and working cooperatively. They are proud to be a member of staff. There is a strong focus on school improvement, which has been initiated by the principal in conjunction with her staff. Parents and carers are engaged, and the school is benefiting from community attention.

Leaders have worked with determination to establish a successful and thriving school over the past 12 months. They fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school standards are met consistently. Premises are suitable and well maintained. Provision for the performing arts is extensive. Policy documents are well written and regularly updated. Complaints procedures are securely established.

Leaders have ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The welfare, well-being and safety of all pupils is a high priority for the school. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and frequent updates. Staff know pupils well. They know how to identify risks and what to do if they have any concerns. External support is sought where necessary.

Pupils confirm that they feel safe, and they are clear about who to go to with any concerns. The vast majority of parents say that their children are safe and happy. Pupils say that the school has been supportive in raising awareness about relationships and online safety.

The safeguarding policy on the school's website meets statutory requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's curriculum is not yet fully embedded. The school has only been open for one year and further work is needed to embed the curriculum and develop the BTEC National Diplomas. Leaders should build on this positive start in order to secure a well-structured and highly ambitious curriculum. They should share the best practice that already exists across all subject areas.
- Links and connections across subjects are not always identified and used in order to deepen and consolidate pupils' learning. As a result, pupils do not always make important connections to help them learn and remember more. Leaders need to align curriculum topics so that pupils can make the right connections at the right time to support them to learn more and remember more.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

School details

Unique reference number	148632
DfE registration number	886/6164
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10243542
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Mandy Ellen
Headteacher	Mandy Ellen
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,000 to £15,000
Telephone number	01622 756644
Website	www.mepaacademy.com
Email address	info@mepaacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- MEPA Academy is a small 11 to 16 independent school with a focus on performing arts. The school opened in September 2021 and is registered for up to 50 pupils aged 11 to 16 years.
- The school is governed by a sole proprietor, who is also the principal of the school. She is supported by a management team which comprises other school leaders, with external experts providing consultancy support where necessary.
- The school is based in premises in the centre of Maidstone, ME14 1PF. The main site is part-owned and part-leased by the proprietor. Pupils also make use of Studio 6, which is a performance venue owned by the proprietor and a short walk away from the main school, ME16 8PP.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector conducted deep dives in English and mathematics, and visual and performing arts covering dance, drama and music. For each deep dive, he discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, talked with teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, staff and pupils. He considered policies provided by the school and looked at curriculum documentation, behaviour logs, attendance records and destination statistics. He held formal and informal discussions with pupils.
- The inspector met with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, including pre-employment checks on staff and employee files. Discussions were held with pupils and staff to consider the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspector considered a range of evidence to check compliance with the independent school standards.

- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey of parents' views and additional written comments from parents. He reviewed the survey returns and responses to the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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