

# My Choice School – Maple House

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

**Inspection dates** 11–12 February 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Pupils' achievement	Inadequate	4
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Quality of curriculum	Inadequate	4
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings

### This school is inadequate because

- Students' academic achievement is inadequate. Their progress is too slow, especially in literacy and numeracy.
- There are weaknesses in the quality of teaching, including planning, assessment and use of resources, which inhibit students' progress.
- There are weaknesses in the academic curriculum which is not sufficiently adjusted to meet the requirements of the students. These weaknesses adversely affect students' achievement.
- The proprietor and the school's managers do not have sufficiently robust procedures for self-evaluation. There is no clear plan for school improvement, especially to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students' behaviour and personal development are good.
- The arrangements to safeguard the students' welfare, health and safety are good.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed four lessons taught by three different teachers, looked at students' work and held meetings with the headteacher, staff, carers and students.
- The inspector looked at school documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records and reports of students' progress and staff training records. The school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools was also checked.
- The views of staff and parents and carers were considered including views obtained from questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Greg Sorrell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Maple House is a very small independent secondary special school providing education for boys and girls from 11 to 16 years of age with a residential provision. All students have a statement of special educational needs related to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, challenging behaviours and other complex needs.
- The school was first registered in 2009 although it does not always have students on roll.
- The four teaching staff, some of whom work part time in the school, are led and managed by a headteacher who oversees seven other schools.
- The school's aims include, 'to raise self-esteem and to promote positive behaviour so that students achieve a place at a college of further education or employment and to work in partnership with parents and carers'.
- This is the school's first inspection.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school's leaders and managers fully analyse students' statements of special educational needs and provide an academic education that fully meets the specific requirements listed for each student.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
  - Produce a curriculum policy set out in writing which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and ensure it implemented effectively (paragraph 2(1)).
  - Ensure that the subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of students, including those students with a statement of special educational needs (paragraph 2(2)(b)).
  - Where students have a statement of special educational needs ensure the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 2(2)(e)).
  - Ensure provision is made for appropriate careers guidance for students receiving secondary education (paragraph 2(2)(g)).
  - Ensure that the curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to learn and make progress (paragraph 2(2)(i)).
  - Ensure that the curriculum provides adequate preparation of students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life (paragraph 2(2)(j)).
  - Ensure that the teaching enables students to acquire new knowledge and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 3(a)).
  - Ensure that the teaching encourages students to apply intellectual, physical or creative effort and to show interest in their work and to think and learn for themselves (paragraph 3(b)).
  - Ensure that the teaching involves well-planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and appropriate management of class time (paragraph 3(c)).
  - Ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 3(d)).
  - Provide classroom resources that are of an adequate quality, quantity and range and are used effectively (paragraph 3(f)).
  - Provide a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, and ensure that information from such assessment is utilised to plan teaching so that students can make progress (paragraph 3(g)).

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

### Inadequate

Students' academic achievement is inadequate. The factors that impact most significantly and adversely upon students' achievement are the weaknesses in teaching, use of assessment and the relevance of the curriculum. Overall, achievement in literacy and numeracy is inadequate. For example, achievement in numeracy is adequate when rooted in practical experiences but some of the concepts of measurement, including time, are not consistently explored through real-life experiences, therefore weakening students' understanding. Similarly, community experiences, such as shopping, are not always followed up in the classroom which limits their effectiveness. In literacy, there are some instances when achievement is adequate, notably when students reflect upon their experiences and complete their diaries. In these instances, their handwriting is generally legible and the correct structure of sentences is achieved with appropriate staff support. However, the lack of a suitably structured programme for the development of social language (as required by their statements of special educational needs) has resulted in students' inadequate progress in the key aspects of speaking and listening. In turn, this has had negative impact on progress in other aspects of literacy and on other subjects. In the current academic year, the students have made some progress in the Unit Award Scheme, especially in English. However, students' achievement in other units of work is much more limited and therefore inadequate.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

### Good

Students' behaviour and personal development are good. Staff offer good role models in their relationships with students and this assists the students to engage in learning more effectively than is indicated from previous school inspection reports. Some students have well-documented histories of fragmented education and very limited engagement in learning.

The school's intervention strategies have been significant in improving behaviour. Attendance rates have risen markedly since students' arrival at the school and, although it is only 80% for this current academic year, this represents a significant improvement on their previous attendance. The school's close links with parents and carers also promotes the students' much improved attendance levels. Students engage positively in the majority of lessons although there is variation depending upon their emotional state and the task in hand.

The quality and effectiveness of the school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The school works hard to instil a sense of working with and for others. This is especially evident in the residential setting where living as part of a community is strongly encouraged. In school time there are regular opportunities for reflection during and at the end of the day. The promotion of the students' social and emotional development is given a high priority. Staff take every opportunity to give positive feedback and praise to help increase students' ability to work by themselves and raise their self-esteem and confidence where it is acknowledged to be low.

Cultural and spiritual development and learning about British public institutions and about life in a multicultural society are suitably promoted through the curriculum and educational visits to and visitors from various public services including the police, health centres, museums and galleries. The local and wider communities are regularly used to promote students' social development, for example with visits to London for cultural events. Close attention is paid to the calendar of festivals that celebrate the traditions and beliefs of other cultures. The school staff are well aware of their responsibility to ensure that extremist views are not promoted.

**Quality of teaching****Inadequate**

In contrast to the good quality of teachers' support for students' personal development, the quality of teaching of academic knowledge and skills is inadequate. A significant weakness is the lack of precision in planning lessons to meet the specific academic needs of the students. This weakens achievement substantially. In addition, all lessons are taught by a teacher and teaching assistants from the residential provision. Although the residential staff are allocated to lessons they are not deployed to best effect to support learning. For example, they are not involved in lesson planning or assessment and sometimes work in an adjacent room to the classroom. Occasionally, the assistants are required to lead lessons even though they are unaccustomed to this role. Again, this weakens achievement.

The quality of teaching is also adversely affected by a shortage of resources for giving students practical experiences in science, mathematics and design and technology. There is little evidence of students using computer programs to support their literacy work although teachers make good use of internet-based resources to illustrate points in support of students' topic work; for example, world maps when studying geography. The shortage of resources was highlighted during the inspection when the school placed orders for computer-assisted literacy and numeracy resources as recommended in students' statements of special educational needs. A programme to develop the social use of language has also been recently ordered following further analysis of students' statements. Regular use is made of contacts with the community although there are occasions when visits lack a sufficient academic focus that can be followed up and consolidated on back at school.

There are some strengths. One is the quality of relationships which staff have with the students and this encourages students to respond positively to the lesson. Equally, some staff are skilled in the use of signing and picture exchange to assist the students' communication skills. The staff manage students' behaviour well and this has a positive impact on the students' attitudes, self-esteem and personal development.

Students' work is marked frequently and feedback is provided promptly. Teachers evaluate learning when units have been completed. Assessment arrangements for the Unit Award Scheme are suitable. However, teachers are not familiar with national guidance about making judgements on levels of achievement by students. This lack of understanding means that teaching is not being suitably focused on students' needs and it prevents the setting of challenging targets for students.

**Quality of curriculum****Inadequate**

The curriculum is inadequate. The planned curriculum covers the National Curriculum and all required areas of learning are offered on the timetable. The current schemes of work are extensively supported by AQA Unit Awards with a focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. There are some good examples of appropriate modification of the National Curriculum; for example, work in science has a particular focus upon health and hygiene. The provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is good and is well supported by the residential staff who support the students in promoting the development of their self-help skills, such as assisting with laundry, cooking nutritious meals and personal hygiene.

However, insufficient account is taken of students' individual special educational needs in the delivery of this curriculum. For example, in practice, there is a lack of an appropriate structure to students' language and communication development. Studies of castles, world maps and the Great Fire of London in history and geography are of little relevance to the identified needs of these students at this time in their school life. The use of worksheets to record tasks is sometimes appropriate although there is good evidence of overuse. This practice does not fully support the identified needs in students' statements of special educational needs; for example, to provide multi-sensory experiences and practical resources whenever possible.

The work-related curriculum suitably covers study of examples from the local community and different social settings. However, the school has requested support from the local careers education and guidance service but none has yet been received. No steps have yet been taken to explore progression routes into work or further education for students in their final year.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

The provision for the students' welfare, health and safety is good and all regulations are met. Safeguarding procedures are good and comply fully with requirements. All checks on staff have been completed and are recorded in a single central register as required. There are appropriate policies for child protection and safe recruitment of staff. All staff, including the designated officer for child protection, are regularly trained at the appropriate levels. The school has appropriately identified the benefits of training a member of staff to act as a deputy-designated officer. There are appropriate policies and procedures to ensure the safety of students both on and off site.

The good student-staff ratios and dedicated staff ensure that the students feel safe and know where to turn for help when required. The students are made aware that bullying is not tolerated and records indicate that there are no incidents during the school day or in the home. Registers of attendance and admissions are appropriately kept as are records of incidents and accidents. The students are offered healthy meals and access to regular exercise such as swimming. The school has well-established relationships with external agencies to support the students' mental health and physical well-being. In addition to routine health and safety checks, fire safety and electrical equipment is regularly tested.

### **Leadership and management**

**Inadequate**

The leadership and management are inadequate because students' academic achievement is inadequate and, in particular, insufficient attention is paid to developing students' literacy skills. The school has not yet found a way to ensure that students make progress in their academic work.

The school lacks rigorous processes for making checks on its own performance. Consequently, this limits the proprietor's ability to hold the school to account and adversely affects the school's ability to plan developments to improve its educational provision. For example, there is no written improvement plan or any indication of how improvements would be resourced. The headteacher observes classroom practice and has identified weaknesses in teachers' planning, resources and the deployment of teaching assistants, but this information has not yet brought about significant improvements in the quality of teaching, students' achievement and the curriculum. The proprietor has not ensured that the curriculum takes sufficient account of students' statements of special educational needs.

The proprietor has ensured that the safeguarding arrangements for students' welfare, health and safety are good. The proprietor has also ensured that staff receive extensive training to support students' welfare, health and safety but the provision of training for all teaching staff so that they can meet the academic educational needs of students is inadequate.

The premises are well maintained and suitable for safe and effective learning. All the required information is provided to parents, carers and local authorities. The policy and procedures for complaints meet requirements. The results of two questionnaires received from staff and parents and carers were positive about the work of the school.

The proprietor has not ensured that all the regulations for independent schools are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136045
<b>Inspection number</b>	410988
<b>DfE registration number</b>	938/6278
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School status</b>	Independent residential special school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Proprietor</b>	My Choice
<b>Chair</b>	Alex Hyland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annie Murphy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	This is the school's first inspection.



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