

Inspection of My Choice School Arundel

2 Sefton Lane, Warningcamp, Arundel, West Sussex, West Sussex BN18 9QY

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are well cared for. Most feel safe and trust staff to look after them and teach them. Pupils know that staff listen to their views and adapt learning activities to suit their changing needs. Raised expectations of their achievement enable pupils to go on to successful college placements when they leave the school.

Pupils typically get on well together. Most understand that any disruptive behaviour in the school is probably because someone is struggling with their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Staff help pupils to understand their feelings. Adults are adept at giving pupils the time and space they need to reset themselves so that they can return to learning. Nevertheless, some pupils do worry about others' behaviour. Leaders work sensitively to help pupils understand themselves and others, including making sure that any bullying is stopped.

The disruption caused by the pandemic has added to pupils' anxieties. Some find it hard to come into school every day. Recently, some of these pupils have displayed unusually disorderly behaviour while in school. Leaders have made careful adaptations to these pupils' learning to help pupils to cope.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have significantly improved the curriculum. Pupils' learning is centred around English, mathematics, science and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). In addition, pupils undertake projects in areas that interest them, such as geography and textiles. Music lessons are especially enjoyed by some pupils. Each subject is typically well designed and sequenced to build pupils' learning over time.

Teachers are skilled at helping pupils learn. They make lessons as practical as possible where this suits pupils' SEMH needs. Teachers use assessment well to help identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Teachers constantly amend their teaching to help fill in these gaps.

Over time, pupils are increasingly successful. Pupils gain qualifications and certification in a range of subjects. For many, this is a huge achievement. It shows the difference that the school is making for many pupils who struggled to attend school in the past. This success adds to their confidence and prepares them well for their next stage of education. Importantly, last year all pupils who left school at the end of Year 11 went on to study courses at college, which they are sustaining well.

Several initiatives are improving pupils' access to reading. The new library is well stocked with age-appropriate stories which interest pupils and broaden their horizons. All teachers are trained in phonics so that they can effectively help pupils who struggle to read. However, there is not a systematic approach to identifying pupils' gaps in phonics or making sure that these gaps are filled quickly. As a result, some pupils are not catching up quickly enough.

Pupils at the school have complex needs, often as a result of traumatic and chaotic backgrounds. Adults know pupils very well. They pay close attention to the requirements of pupils' education, health and care plans when deciding what and how best to teach pupils. Consequently, the curriculum is constantly adapted to meet pupils' SEMH needs. For example, adults are patient and calm when pupils are not emotionally ready to learn. They listen carefully and adapt their teaching to suit pupils' needs. This approach typically means that pupils who become agitated or angry are patiently helped to regulate their emotions and return to learning.

Leaders have worked hard to embed this calm approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Staff are fully on board and well trained in the methods they need to use. Staff consistently reinforce boundaries, such as appropriate use of mobile phones. They address any aggressive and intimidating verbal behaviour from pupils. Over time, leaders and staff help pupils to manage their SEMH needs so that they have fewer outbursts. This helps pupils to build their self-esteem and become more positive about their potential futures.

However, recently, there has been an increase in behaviour incidents for some pupils with particularly complex backgrounds and needs. Leaders have made quick adaptations to help pupils manage. This includes reducing their anxieties by spending time-limited opportunities to learn at home, where it is safe for pupils to do so. These arrangements are starting to help pupils to manage their emotions. Additional staff have been recruited to allow for even closer supervision of pupils to help de-escalate issues before they become incidents.

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development. They make sure that pupils are well prepared for their future lives. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online, out in the community and in relationships. Trips to the shops and journeys on the train help pupils to gain confidence in the world around them. Pupils are encouraged to think about future careers right from when they join the school. Those who are ready are supported to attend a local college part-time. They study age-appropriate courses in subjects such as construction and animal care. Pupils relish this opportunity because they prove to themselves that they can manage in a larger environment.

The proprietor body oversees the work of the school well. They check that pupils' needs are supported and have made sure that the curriculum has improved. They make sure that the independent school standards are met consistently over time. Leaders recognise the particular stresses and strains staff face in teaching pupils with such complex needs. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration of their workload. They know that leaders are always there and will step in to help should pupils need extra support to manage their behaviour.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are very well trained to spot when a pupil is at risk of harm. Pupils' risk assessments are updated very regularly based on any changes in pupils' behaviour and additional information about pupils' safety that the school collects. The curriculum is adjusted sensitively to help any pupil who needs to learn specific new information to help keep themselves safe.

Pupils know they can talk to adults about things that are worrying them. Leaders are tenacious about getting pupils the extra help they need to be safe. They work with other professionals and escalate concerns when necessary. Leaders follow safer recruitment procedures appropriately.

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

- Some pupils are currently struggling to maintain calm behaviour in school. This has resulted in time-limited part-time timetables for some pupils. Leaders need to continue to address pupils' behavioural needs so that incidents reduce and pupils are able to attend school regularly.
- Some pupils cannot read well enough. This limits their access to future learning. Leaders need to implement a strategic approach to identifying pupils' gaps in phonics and a systematic approach to filling these gaps so that pupils quickly learn to read fluently and accurately.

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	135111
DfE registration number	938/6272
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10232312
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	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	My Choice Children's Homes Ltd
Chair	Alex Hyland
Headteacher	Clare Wye
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,610
Telephone number	01903 898060
Website	www.my-choice-homes.com
Email address	a.murphy@my-choice-homes.com
Dates of previous inspection	19 to 21 November 2019

Information about this school

- The school is an independent special school for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils have been unable to access or sustain placements in other schools. Most have had significant disruption to, and gaps in, their previous schooling. All pupils are placed by local authorities and have an education, health and care plan. Many have attachment and anxiety disorders.
- The proprietor also runs children's homes in West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey.
- The school received a standard inspection in November 2019 when it was judged to require improvement. A material change inspection to increase the number of pupils on roll took place in March 2022.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered provider of alternative provision. Pupils attend for one or two days a week.
- The headteacher was appointed in November 2020, having previously been deputy headteacher at the school. The head of education oversees the running of the school.
- Several pupils currently follow a 'blended timetable'. This means that they attend school for part of the week, and are set work to do at home for the rest of the week.

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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the head of education, the head of school and a member of the proprietor body. The inspector also met with the teachers and teaching assistants who work in the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: science, PSHE and reading. For these deep dives the inspector met with teachers, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also spoke with some pupils.
- The inspector also looked at curriculum information and pupils' work in some other subjects.

- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector spoke with leaders and staff and scrutinised the school's records, including the single central record of employment checks.
- The inspector observed the work of the school and checked the school's arrangements for meeting the independent school standards. She toured the premises and spoke with some pupils informally at breaktimes.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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