

Inspection of MacIntyre School

Leighton Road, Wingrave, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP22 4PA

Inspection dates: 14–16 January 2020

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils start to experience success, where their complex needs have meant they floundered at previous schools. Pupils usually join the school unable to communicate in appropriate or effective ways. They start to learn ways to convey their immediate wants, are enabled to begin to express choices, and sometimes much more. Adults work hard to give pupils ways to have a voice, verbally or otherwise.

Where pupils' complex needs and challenging behaviour have restricted opportunities available to them elsewhere, this school goes out of its way to 'open doors'. Staff frequently get pupils 'out and about', for example to the swimming pool, shops or farm.

Adults never stop wanting the best for pupils. They see what each pupil might be capable of and work patiently and determinedly towards it. This is a school of aspiration and positivity.

Pupils joining the school often find it difficult to share space. The environment is organised to help pupils feel calm enough to learn. The school helps many pupils find ways to cope near other people and sometimes even enjoy interacting with adults and their peers.

Adults help pupils keep safe and develop positive relationships. They successfully tackle behaviour that may upset others.

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

This school does very well for its pupils and is continuing to improve. There is a close-knit team working together in pupils' best interests. The expertise of leaders, classroom staff, therapists, the school nurse and other professionals, is put to good use to support pupils' progress.

Developing pupils' ability to communicate is a central priority. The school embraces a wide range of ways pupils may be able to learn to recognise and communicate their own thoughts and feelings. It aims to find the best method for each individual.

At all times, the focus on communication and interaction is clear. These aspects are reinforced across the curriculum. Staff keep a close check on the progress that pupils make to plan their next steps. Assessment procedures are well conceived and link closely with the curriculum.

The restructured leadership team are clear and resolute about what they want to achieve. They aim to equip pupils with the skills and strategies to engage in adult life with as many options and as much independence as possible.

To this end, leaders have radically overhauled the curriculum. They aim to make sure it is relevant, meaningful and helpful for pupils. Paying close attention to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, the curriculum is personalised to each pupil's needs and the next steps they need to take.

Leaders take a realistic and creative view of what reading means at this school. They, and teachers, are suitably ambitious for all, including the most able readers.

Approaching reading and writing through the use of symbols is transformative for some pupils. It can build from communicating simple requests to more involved activities. For example, some pupils learn to follow symbol instructions to carry out the various stages of a task. Similarly, they might use symbols to write a shopping list, for instance.

Pupils' complex needs mean that they need sensitive support. Staff are unfazed by pupils' challenging behaviour and handle incidents well. Some very skilful examples of positive behaviour management were seen during this inspection.

Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is strong. Adults' expectations are high. Their relationships with pupils are respectful and warm.

Adults keep a firm focus on the intended purpose of all activities. They use various techniques to support communication. Staff know and reinforce pupils' targets, giving precise and encouraging feedback. Their obvious joy in the progress that pupils make reflects their care about what the school does.

This school goes above and beyond to support pupils' personal development.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is woven into all areas of the curriculum. Inextricably linked with communication, it is at the heart of what the school does. A continual focus on independence skills helps pupils to build strategies for now and the future.

Pupils' personalised timetables provide for a rich and enriching week. Pupils frequently venture out of school for activities such as recycling, horse riding and orienteering, to name a few. Opportunities in music, art and performing suit some pupils and add further breath to their experience.

Leaders and staff invest much care and effort to support pupils as they join or leave the school. This work is a real strength, especially as the time to move on approaches. Arrangements are highly bespoke and take as much account of pupils' views as they can. There are some inspiring stories about what one or two former pupils are doing now. Leaders are eager to build on this success.

Leaders know their school well and have a deep understanding of the complex context. Plans for change are ambitious and well considered. The strong leadership from senior leaders has already resulted in much success. Leaders have planned where further actions will bring them still closer to what they set out to achieve.

There is a great deal of consistency in the approach and quality of education across the 'lower school' (ages 10 to 16) and the 'upper school' (ages 16 to 19 or sixth form). But the aims for some pupils at the end of upper school are not as well defined as they could be, to help refine the curriculum designed to meet those aims.

Staff are extremely proud to work at this school, and rightly so. Leaders take care to make sure that staffing levels are safe. Staff are well trained, especially about safeguarding and meeting pupils' medical needs.

The proprietor provides effective oversight. All independent school standards are met. The school's accessibility plan shows the progress the school has made in this area in recent years. The local advisory board is developing well. This extra layer of governance helps strengthen links with parents and the community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school rises to the challenge of safeguarding pupils with significant communication difficulties. An important part of this work is helping pupils with complex needs recognise whether or not they feel safe and to know when they need help. Strategies are aimed at those with the lowest levels of communication. The school takes a sensitive and bespoke approach to teaching pupils about keeping themselves safe in different ways.

Procedures for checking the suitability of staff are robust. Leaders and staff are alert to signs that pupils are feeling unsafe or unwell and take appropriate action.

What does the school need to do to improve?

Information for the school and proprietor

- This school is moving strongly forward as part of a carefully conceived strategic plan. Leaders should continue this journey, ensuring that the final stages are consistently and securely embedded to maximise the impact on pupils' outcomes.
- There is no doubt that this school is aspirational for its pupils. Leaders should make sure that the best potential outcomes at age 19 are explicitly identified for each pupil. They should use this to further hone the curriculum and provide optimal opportunities to achieve that aim. This is to ensure that pupils are even better prepared for their futures and to secure the broadest possible range of options for their next steps. For some, this might include continuing in education, or suitable work placements.

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

Unique reference number	110564
DfE registration number	825/6011
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10123968
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	MacIntyre Charity
Chair	Alice Soule (Local Advisory Body Chair)
Headteacher	Catherine Clifford (Head of Education) Maria Fiddimore (Executive Lead)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000 to £73,000
Telephone number	01296 681274
Website	www.macintyrecharity.org
Email address	wingrave@macintyrecharity.org
Date of previous inspection	13–15 June 2017

Information about this school

- The school's leadership structure has changed since the previous standard inspection of 13–15 June 2017. The school is now run on a day-to-day basis by the head of education, line-managed by the executive lead. There is also a deputy headteacher.
- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have an EHC plan linked with their complex needs such as severe learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder, for example.
- The school does not make use of 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.

- We worked closely throughout the inspection with the head of education and deputy headteacher. We also kept in touch regularly with the executive lead.
- We spoke with leaders and staff, formally and informally. We also met with two members of the local advisory board, including the chair. A meeting was held with a director representing the proprietorial body. We met pupils as we visited them in class.
- We took account of the views expressed in 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and 24 confidential questionnaires returned by staff. We also noted the contents of a letter received from a pupil.
- To help understand the quality of education, we looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, communication, PSHE and physical development. This involved speaking with leaders and teachers as well as visiting pupils in class during activities relating to these aspects of learning. We examined plans for these aspects of the curriculum in conjunction with pupils' EHC plans and reviewed evidence about pupils' learning. We also explored with leaders how pupils' numeracy is developed across the curriculum.
- We scrutinised the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including written records. We checked the single central record which summarises checks of the suitability of adults.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Becky Greenhalgh

Ofsted Inspector

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