

# Inspection of Maple Grove School

Clare Avenue, Chester CH2 3HR

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Inspection dates: 5 to 7 November 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	<b>Yes</b>

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils thrive in this nurturing setting. Pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), love their school. They are happy. They arrive at the school in the morning full of smiles, eager to meet the staff team that is cheerfully waiting for them.

The school has high expectations of, and is highly ambitious for, every pupil and student in the sixth form. It has a clear understanding of pupils' additional needs. The bespoke curriculum that is in place for each pupil means that they achieve well.

The clinical and pastoral teams help pupils to learn to understand what makes them anxious and how they can manage their emotions and feelings. This helps them to feel safe. This support is exceptional. The pupils make notable and often life-changing personal progress.

Pupils enjoy playing in the many outdoor and forest areas with their friends. They take part in sports clubs and learn to ride bikes. They enjoy looking after the plethora of animals that the school owns. Pupils' particular favourites are Martin the axolotl and Kevin the tarantula. Alongside developing pupils' interests and talents, these opportunities support pupils to undertake additional responsibilities and to become more independent.

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

The school has designed a well-sequenced and ambitious curriculum. It has recently refined the curriculum pathways that pupils, from the early years to the sixth form, follow. These pathways help to meet pupils' additional needs effectively. In most subject areas, staff adeptly draw on the school's curriculum thinking to design bespoke lessons that meet each pupil's needs. However, the school has not provided teachers with adequate subject-specific guidance. This weakens how effectively the curriculum is delivered in these areas.

The school has a robust understanding of how well pupils learn. This ensures that it correctly identifies pupils' individual starting points and provides them with the support that they need to learn successfully. The school accurately captures the small, but significant steps that pupils make in their learning.

From the start, staff prioritise communication and language to ensure that pupils have the necessary skills when formal reading teaching begins. Pupils at an early stage of reading learn to read using phonics. However, some pupils read books that do not match their phonics ability, limiting their opportunities to practice the sounds that they are learning. As a result, that they do not become confident and fluent readers quickly enough.

Communication skills are at the heart of the curriculum for every pupil. Staff and pupils understand how best to communicate with each other. For example, some

pupils make use of technology, while others use picture-based methods of communication. The recent introduction of a British Sign Language curriculum has further supported effective communication among pupils and staff. Pupils make rapid progress in their ability to communicate. This means that pupils are exceedingly well prepared to communicate in their future lives.

The school meets pupils' additional needs well. It provides precise support aligned with pupils' education, health and care plans. The highly skilled staff team consists of education and clinical staff. These include occupational therapy and speech and language experts. They work seamlessly to assess each pupil's needs upon entry and throughout their time at Maple Grove School. The school is skilled at identifying pupils' previously undiagnosed needs.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. They greet each other warmly and are extremely respectful of the school routines. Consistent routines, applied by staff throughout the school, help pupils to manage their behaviour. Staff quickly notice when a pupil becomes anxious or struggles to cope and they intervene skilfully. As a result, any disruption to pupils' learning is rare.

The post-16 provision focuses closely on students' aspirations. Students secure the numeracy and literacy skills that they need for their next steps. They enjoy the range of enrichment activities that are planned for them. Students take courses offered by local educational partners, which help them to interact confidently with new people. The school prepares students very well for their futures, this includes practice with travelling independently.

Pupils gain qualifications in a wide range of subjects. They benefit from a comprehensive programme of in-house and external careers information advice and guidance. Pupils learn how to present themselves in interview situations. They have also visited local colleges and businesses. They are supported well to take their next steps into further education, employment or training.

Pupils benefit from an array of interesting and exciting activities offered through the school's tailored Friday enrichment programme. Many pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme which fosters pupils' leadership skills. Trips, both local and international, such as to Belfast, are inspiring. There is a rich offer of clubs and activities to suit everyone, such as tennis, bicycle maintenance and music lessons. These wide and varied experiences increase pupils' knowledge and awareness of the world around them.

The proprietor and the school have close oversight of the strengths and areas for further development at the school. Together, they ensure that the independent school standards ('the standards') are consistently and securely met. For example, there are clear systems in place for the proprietor to scrutinise the suitability of premises and the quality of education. The proprietor fully supports the school in its focus on staff workload and well-being. It enables staff to make the best possible impact on pupils' education.

The school has a suitable safeguarding policy that meets current statutory guidance. It, along with other policies, is made available to parents and carers on the school's website and on request. The school has ensured that it is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- In a few subjects, staff do not have the necessary guidance that they require to deliver the curriculums consistently well. This means that some pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school should ensure that it fully embeds the work done to develop the curriculum and how well it is taught, so that pupils achieve consistently well across the range of subjects taught.
- Sometimes, the books that pupils read are not closely matched to the sounds that they know. This restricts pupils' opportunities to practice these sounds and limits their ability to become confident and fluent readers. The school should make sure that all pupils have books which closely match the sounds they know.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	147737
<b>DfE registration number</b>	896/6008
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	10342159
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent Special School
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	55
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	7
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Acorn Care and Education Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Ann Henderson
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Ben Reading
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£38,545 to £97,664
<b>Telephone number</b>	01244 257950
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.maplegroveschool.org">www.maplegroveschool.org</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@maplegroveschool.org">info@maplegroveschool.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	30 November to 2 December 2021

## Information about this school

- The school operates from premises at Clare Avenue, Chester, Cheshire CH2 3HR.
- The school is part of Acorn Care and Education Limited.
- The school has an executive headteacher, who oversees this school and one other, and a head of school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school caters for pupils who have a range of SEND, including autism and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The number of pupils on the school roll has increased from 51 to 55. This exceeds the number of pupils agreed at the school's registration.
- At the time of the inspection, there were too few children in the early years to reach a judgement about this provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, the head of school and other members of the senior leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including that relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the checks that had been carried out on staff to ensure their suitability, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school

has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to the Ofsted survey for staff and spoke to members of staff about their well-being and workload.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. However, inspectors spoke with some pupils about their work and school life.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at social times, in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and communication, mathematics and modern foreign languages. They met leaders and teachers and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning in these subjects. They also considered the curriculum across some other subject areas and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school premises.

### **Inspection team**

Rebecca Sharples, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachael Alarcon

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
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