

River House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125795
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	359944
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John West
Headteacher	Michael Turner
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2008
School address	Stratford Road Henley-in-Arden B95 6AD
Telephone number	01564 792514
Fax number	01564 792179
Email address	admin7001@we-learn.com

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2011
Inspection number	359944

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. A total of 11 lessons were observed, taught by 11 teachers, all with support from teaching assistants. Meetings and discussions were held with members of the school's leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, the school improvement partner, the education welfare officer, teachers and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at safeguarding arrangements, as well as a range of policy and planning documentation and pupils' work. A total of seven parent and carer questionnaires were received, together with 17 from staff and 22 from pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Systems for tracking and monitoring individual pupil progress.
- Curriculum developments since the last inspection.
- The effectiveness of the Key Stage 4 off-site provision.
- Systems for supporting the social and emotional well-being of pupils.

Information about the school

River House is a small special school that provides education for secondary-aged boys from around the county. All have statements for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, with a majority having additional learning problems that also need to be addressed. In addition to the school-based provision the school has an agreement with the local authority to provide vocationally-based education for a group of pupils at Key Stage 4, almost all of whom have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. Virtually all are of White British heritage and the proportion eligible for free school meals are well above the national average. The school has Healthy Schools status and has been awarded the Sports Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

River House is a good school that has made good progress since its last inspection. Effective leadership and management have overseen major improvements in the use of data to track pupils' progress and achievement which is at the heart of the school's improvement. This added to the effective processes that were already in place to ensure the social and emotional well-being of pupils, which are strengthened by effective partnerships with external professionals. School leaders have created a committed staff team who show empathy and rapport with the pupils, who can sometimes be very challenging - one staff member wrote 'I am very proud of the progress made by pupils', reflecting this positive commitment. Governance is effective, challenging and holding the school to account and fulfilling all its statutory responsibilities. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors both have experience of senior management in secondary education and use their expertise to good effect.

When pupils enter the school, after a history of previous educational failure and permanent exclusion from mainstream schools, their levels of attainment are low. They are successfully engaged in learning by the expertise of the teachers and teaching assistants, who work together very effectively, so pupils make good progress although attainment remains below average. By the end of Year 11 all achieve external qualifications and go on to further education, employment or training. Teaching is effective because it engages the pupils, filling in gaps in their knowledge and helping them to get involved in positive learning, often for the first time in their school careers. Because the school now has much more information on the progress of its pupils, teachers are in a position to support each individual's learning matched to his/her needs, and to set challenging targets for each pupil. This means that staff are in a position where they can begin to maximise the potential of pupils. However, the school has not yet fully developed the system it plans to use to create tracking programmes, such as the assessment of pupil progress (APP). Similarly, there is not yet a common system in place by which teachers mark and assess pupils' work, which makes comparisons between subjects or year groups more difficult.

Pupils enjoy school, or participating in the individual learning packages that are put together for those following the vocational pathway in Key Stage 4. This off-site provision is proving very effective in supporting and maintaining pupils within the education system. The curriculum has been enhanced by the effective development of a range of courses and opportunities to gain external accreditation which was not available at the last inspection. However, attendance remains very low overall despite the best efforts of the school, which are rigorous and starting to bring about improvement. All pupils are potentially vulnerable and the school places a strong emphasis on safeguarding. This links to the calm and well-ordered atmosphere of the school. Behaviour is good and all staff have received specialist training in promoting this. The school has been awarded Healthy

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Schools status and the Sports Mark in recognition of its good work in promoting healthy lifestyles. For instance, it is impressively promoting healthy diets and participation in a range of sports and outdoor education. The school is engaged in a range of positive community links at home and abroad, which successfully challenge the insularity that pupils sometimes show when they first start. The care, guidance and support they receive are targeted at individual needs and the progress that pupils are able to make is a testament to its outstanding success.

The school's self-evaluation, in which staff and governors participate, is effective. This, coupled with the way it has addressed issues raised in the last inspection and the improvements in teaching and learning that have ensued, gives the school a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the use of systems to promote effective tracking of pupil progress in all subject areas.
- Develop a common system for marking and assessing pupils' work throughout the school.
- Improve pupils' attendance rates so that they come to school more regularly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enter the school with a previous history of fragmented schooling and low attainment. However, they go on to make good, sometimes outstanding, progress in a few cases. Those who are in school throughout their secondary schooling are successfully engaged and ultimately able to demonstrate success in a range of external qualifications such as those of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation (ASDAN), Entry Level, City and Guilds and the GCSE. Last year every pupil gained external accreditation reflecting good improvement in attainment and individual achievement since the last inspection. Pupils who join the individualised vocational provision in Key Stage 4 are also encouraged effectively to gain accreditation through linking with the school and many are responding positively to this opportunity.

Apart from a pride in their achievement pupils say that they enjoy school, usually for the first time. In an environment where they feel safe and protected their behaviour, although potentially challenging, is good. This is supported by the specialist training in promoting good behaviour undertaken by all staff, which includes the use of restraint in extreme and rare circumstances. All such events around unacceptable behaviour and incidents, including those of a bullying or racist nature, are logged. Numbers of exclusions have declined significantly since the last inspection. Pupils develop much improved ability to participate in collaborative activities and to support others. This is reflected in some of the contributions they make to the wider community, such as running the Cyber Cafe or serving Christmas meals at a local community centre. These social skills, as well as practical skills in literacy, numeracy and computing, help them develop skills for their futures at work - although the overall judgement is limited by low attendance. The school works very hard to improve this, including the building of individual family links by the school's education welfare officer. Their efforts are beginning to see improvement, but the overall picture remains unsatisfactory. Cultural awareness is developed in a range of ways

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

which are sometimes 'hands-on', such as the effective partnership that brings a visiting drummer into school. Spiritual dimensions, including self-knowledge, are similarly approached in a practical way - with the 'Wilderness Trek' providing a real challenge and voyage of self-discovery where pupils survive in remote places, relying on each other, developing trust and comradeship, and seeing few if any other people.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

All staff; teachers, instructors and teaching assistants; work together effectively for the good of the pupils to whom they show a great commitment. Teaching observed was good. Lessons are well planned and maintain a good pace. Teachers and pupils use interactive white boards to good effect and lessons use a variety of teaching and learning styles which helps to maintain pupil engagement. Planning is good, teachers show good skills in being flexible to meet developing needs during a lesson and the good rapport they have with pupils creates a positive learning environment. Now that there is much more data available on individual progress teachers are able to individualise their teaching within the small cohorts. The use of resources is good, adding variety and stimulation through practical activities.

All teachers are assessing the work and progress of their pupils satisfactorily, and using this information to challenge them more effectively from the initial baseline produced when they enter the school. Each pupil has individual targets, covering learning, social and

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

personal areas which are challenging and which are reviewed with form tutors every term. By Year 10 this is enabling all pupils to make progress in line with that expected of pupils of that age. The system to track pupil progress over time is not fully established. Marking is undertaken regularly, but at the moment reflects individual styles. The lack of a whole school policy means that comparisons between subjects and different cohorts cannot easily be undertaken.

The curriculum shows major improvements since the last inspection, when it was based heavily around GCSE courses. A broad and stimulating curriculum engages pupils and promotes their improving achievement, sometimes supported well by partnerships which provide expertise not available in school. The core subjects of English, maths and science are covered effectively. Pupils show improving computer skills and enjoy opportunities to participate in a range of creative and artistic opportunities. Sometimes these are promoted by the outstanding broader curriculum, perhaps best reflected in the challenging programmes for outdoor education which do so much to foster personal development. The developing vocationally based curriculum at Key Stage 4 is well-planned and imaginative in meeting the needs of very challenging pupils. It is monitored effectively to ensure that the providers meet the school's expectations. This provision is developing effectively over time.

The care, guidance and support given to each individual pupil is outstanding because the school now has a detailed picture of the social, emotional and educational needs of each of them. The wider difficulties, going beyond their primary learning difficulties, are addressed extremely well and taken into account when statements are reviewed. Safeguarding is a prominent concern and provision is effective. For example, some meetings always begins with an item about safeguarding concerns. Individual guidance to pupils is a strength of the school and the pupils say they feel confident that there are adults to whom they can talk in confidence, knowing that their issues would be taken up. The student voice is taken exceptionally seriously, while links with parents are also promoted and supported, reflecting the effective input of the school's education welfare officer. Weekly drop-in sessions run by the school nurses also provide a confidential source of advice and excellent support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership team, led by the experienced and respected headteacher, is effective in driving improvement. It has created a staff team marked by its determination to do the best for the pupils and a willingness to take on responsibilities that promote this. The

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

school now has, for the first time, a complete overview of the progress of its pupils in their educational, social and emotional development. It is therefore a more effective school than it has been in the past. Governance is good because it is focussed on supporting the school and is now playing an effective role in supporting self-assessment and school improvement. The governing body is aware of its legal duties and meets them in full. Since outcomes for pupils are good, staff are deployed to very good effect and the school's financial resources are targeted at promoting successful outcomes for pupils the school offers good value for money.

Relationships with parents and carers are good. Before a pupil is admitted, a visit is made to the school and beyond and links are developed by class teachers and the education welfare officer. Parents' involvement in the education of their children is expected and so, for example, where it is hard for a parent or carer to get to an annual review the school will provide a taxi to transport them to school, or if this is a problem will hold the review at their home. The open door policy, termly newsletter and school website are other ways in which links with home are supported and sustained. A range of professional and educational partnerships also support and sustain effective learning and progress. The school's commitment to securing equal opportunities for all its pupils supports them all and so pupils experience success in their education.

Since the last inspection the school has successfully played its part in promoting community cohesion. Several initiatives have been noteworthy, for example around the county pupils from River House have painted murals in several of the comprehensive schools, and are currently using calligraphy to illustrate the walls of a mosque in Nuneaton, where several of the pupils live. At an international level links have been developed with schools in the Czech Republic and China that help pupils form a better understanding of the lives of other people.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Views of parents and carers

Although only a comparatively small number of parents responded to the questionnaire, all except one showed a strong level of support for the school. Parents felt that their children enjoyed school and were safe. They were happy with their child's experiences of school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at River House School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received seven completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 54 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	3	43	3	43	0	0	1	14
The school keeps my child safe	3	43	3	43	1	14	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	5	72	2	28	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	4	57	2	28	1	14	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	6	86	0	0	1	14	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	4	57	2	28	1	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	43	3	43	1	14	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	4	57	3	43	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	86	0	0	1	14	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	72	1	14	0	0	1	14
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	57	2	28	1	14	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	6	86	0	0	1	14	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	6	86	0	0	1	14	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of River House School, Henley-in-Arden, B95 6AD

I would like to thank you for the friendly welcome you gave to my colleague and me when we inspected your school recently.

You go to a good school that helps you to learn and make progress. Several of you told us that it was the first time you had ever liked going to school. The school gave us information that showed the progress you are making and the success that pupils are now achieving at to the end of Year 11. It is good to see so many former pupils are now going on to college, training or into jobs.

We saw some interesting and well taught lessons and you played a positive part in them, showing us how much you are learning. You have targets that you work out with your teachers and these will help you to do your very best and be successful. Learning is also helped by the fact that you feel safe in school and that your behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good. Well done!

In order to make River House an even better school we have asked the staff to work on three of areas for improvement:

- they should all mark your work in the same way, so you will be able to compare how well you are doing in different subjects
- the recording of how well you are doing in all subjects as you go through the school should be tracked more effectively, showing your progress as you go through the school
- they should make sure more of you attend school everyday.

I hope you continue to work hard and enjoy school. This will certainly help you to be successful both at River House and then in your later lives. I would like to wish you all good fortune for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.