

Rivermead School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134150
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	381620
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	Stuart Charlton

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Chappell
Headteacher	Sue Rogers
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2009
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Age group	11–19
Inspection date(s)	20–21 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stuart Charlton

Additional inspector

Gary Kirkley

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. One inspector spent two days in the school and the other inspector spent one day. Eighteen lessons were visited and all 10 teachers seen, amounting to over nine hours of classroom observation. The majority of these lessons were joint observations undertaken with senior staff. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the work of the school and looked at documentation such as the school improvement plan, assessment information, students' records and work, statements and annual reviews, as well as school policies. Twenty-nine questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised and also those from 58 of the students and 28 from staff.

Information about the school

Since the previous inspection the designation of the school has changed significantly and it now provides for students aged 11–19 with complex emotional and behavioural needs. It is smaller than average in size and the overwhelming majority of students have a statement of special educational needs mainly related to autistic spectrum disorders. Most students have additional communication and language needs and/or medical/mental health needs. The length of placement at the school depends on individual needs, and many students have spent a considerable amount of time away from mainstream education before admission.

The overwhelming majority of students are White British and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. There have been considerable changes in the management structure and in the roles and responsibilities of senior personnel since the previous inspection. These changes were implemented with effect from September 2011. The provision in the sixth form is still under development. It will be implemented fully in September 2012 and until that time there are no students of this age in the school. The school holds Healthy Schools status and the Sportsmark award.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Rivermead is a good school. Systematic school improvement has been sustained through considerable changes in students’ needs, in the school’s designation and in staffing. It is not outstanding because of some weaknesses in teaching and because middle managers do not take sufficient responsibility in ensuring that the provision in every subject area is of the highest quality. The development of the sixth form is progressing well in preparation for September 2012 when new students will start.
- Students of different ages, backgrounds and abilities make good progress and achieve well. They achieve particularly well in the development of their skills in communication and in mathematics.
- In the vast majority of lessons, teachers provide students with activities that engage their interest and they use information and communication technology (ICT) well to enhance learning. They assess students’ work regularly and accurately and ensure that students know what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, teachers do not use a sufficiently wide range of approaches to ensure each student’s learning is as good as it can be.
- The overwhelming majority of students make significant improvements in learning to manage their own behaviours, and bullying of any kind is almost non-existent. Students feel extremely safe and secure in school at all times. They enjoy school, support each other well and attendance levels are above average.
- The school is very well led and teachers’ performance is generally managed effectively. The strong leadership team ensure there is a sustained focus on improving classroom practice and outcomes for students. Middle leaders, while usually effective, do not always ensure that all subjects are coordinated or managed equally well. The very effective way in which the school promotes students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key factor in its success.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that by September 2012 teachers always use a wide range of approaches so that a greater proportion of teaching is outstanding and the learning of each student is as good as it can be.
- Fully implement the planned changes to the roles and responsibilities of middle managers by September 2012 so that all take greater responsibility for ensuring that the provision in every subject area is of the highest quality.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all students develop their understanding, knowledge and skills well and attainment, by the time students leave school, is broadly average. Different groups achieve equally well from low starting points. Students respond positively to the challenging targets set for them and they achieve well irrespective of their disabilities and special educational needs.

Students apply their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills well across different subject areas. In Year 7, most students learn to structure their writing using paragraphs and begin to read with accuracy and some expression. They learn to recognise the value of numbers and understand basic number concepts. Across the school, students make particularly good progress in developing their skills in communication and they learn to express their views very effectively. Many students in Key Stage 4 have the confidence to attempt to read and write for a wide range of purposes using different support systems and prompts. For example, most successfully interpret the more complex issues in the novel *Of Mice and Men*. Students enjoy working with ICT and use it successfully in a range of different contexts, as seen in a number of lessons where they demonstrated to others how well they had achieved in the lesson. Their developing skills in numeracy, including using multiplication and recognising number patterns, are used to advantage in different contexts in lessons. By the time they leave the school, students gain a good range of national accreditation including GCSE, adult literacy and numeracy and vocational qualifications in areas such as catering and construction. As a result, all move on successfully to the next stage of their education. Parents and carers report that they are very pleased with the progress their children make, and their view is consistent with the inspection findings. In the students' words, 'Everyone helps you so that you learn a lot.'

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Quality of teaching

Teachers carefully assess students when they join the school. They quickly build a detailed picture of the students' abilities and this is used effectively in most lesson planning. Linked to good curriculum plans for different levels of learning, this ensures that activities are mostly matched effectively to students' needs. All staff have good subject knowledge, relationships between students and staff are excellent and students receive appropriately high levels of support. The work of support staff is integral to the success students achieve. Staff use praise and rewards very effectively to build students' self-esteem and to give them the confidence to try new things, contributing very well to the promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Records of students' progress, including observations and photographs of students' achievements, demonstrate good teaching and learning over time. Students are given clear guidance both orally and in written form about how they can improve their work.

Across the school there are examples of outstanding teaching where staff set the highest expectation for every student and use very imaginative teaching activities to ensure excellent outcomes for all. In a Key Stage 4 mathematics lesson, the teacher seized every opportunity to develop students' skills and deepen their understanding by moving very adeptly from one activity to another, keeping a clear focus on practical activities and developing students' confidence and self-esteem. Students' learning was exceptionally well supported by the learning support assistant through continuous recording of students' achievements. In a few lessons, teaching is not of this quality because the range of teaching strategies is limited, for example, in a science lesson where students struggled to grasp fully what they were expected to achieve in their experimental work.

Parents and carers feel their children are well taught and they feel well informed, which is confirmed by inspection findings. Their views are typified by comments such as, 'Teaching is very good and has resulted in my son becoming a confident, independent young person.'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers, staff and students all confirm the substantial improvements that the school makes in the lives of students at school and at home through developing positive attitudes to learning. Students are polite, friendly and respectful to adults and each other and they manage their own behaviour well so that there is a very calm and harmonious working atmosphere throughout the school. The strong liaison between the school staff, the educational psychology service and the multi-disciplinary therapy team is a crucial factor in the school's success in helping students gauge and adapt their own behaviour. Consequently, improvement is rapid and students learn to recognise when they need to help each other. In the dining room and during breaks, where students and staff make very good use of the limited playground facilities, their standard of behaviour is of the highest quality. Records confirm the greatly improved behaviour over time and show that instances of poor

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behaviour are rare and very effectively managed so that the learning of others is not affected. Students' views fully support this assertion.

Parents and carers and students indicate that any type of bullying is extremely rare, not least because staff are particularly good at ensuring students settle in quickly and adapt to the very clear expectations that are set. Students are very keen to support each other, are proud of their school and their work and are keen to stress that any type of bullying is not tolerated. All staff receive extensive training in behaviour management techniques and use the behaviour management system very effectively. They respect students as individuals and use praise and rewards to best effect to reinforce improvements in behaviour. As a result, exclusions are almost non-existent. Staff devote a great deal of time to helping students to listen carefully to instructions and respond to each other's feelings. Parents and carers and students have similar views that confirm the high quality of procedures to keep pupils safe and secure. Students also understand the basic principles of how to keep themselves safe, for example regarding the internet. Although many parents believe behaviour to be a good, a few expressed concerns about behaviour. These were not evident during the inspection.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has an extremely clear view about how the provision should develop in the light of the changes to the school's designation. She is very well supported by a strong leadership team who ensure staff work as a cohesive and effective team and communicate high expectations and ambition. The ways in which senior managers support and develop the staff ensure they are enthusiastic in wanting to improve to meet students' changing needs. Strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified through frequent observations by the senior team. This is accurately identifying those teachers who still need to increase their range of teaching styles and is effective in providing examples of how this could be achieved. The implementation of effective staff training to deal with the increasing complexity of students' needs, improvements in teaching and student outcomes, the changes to the curriculum and the significant improvements the school makes to students' behaviour show that it has good capacity to improve further.

The good curriculum ensures systematic development of students' basic skills. Increasing use of therapies and sensory experiences is ensuring that it is adapting well to meet the increasing range and complexity of students' needs. The phased introduction of specialist provision is working well in providing opportunities for students to use their communication and numeracy skills in other subjects. The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, particularly in assemblies, and is well supported by the wide range of extra-curricular activities.

Leaders at all levels are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and show clear commitment to future improvement. However, the school has recognised that middle managers do not as yet take enough responsibility for ensuring that the

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provision in every subject area is of the highest quality. It has identified further training in this area as a priority development. The governing body challenges the school well and they and school leaders ensure that the policies and procedures to promote academic and social equality, tackle any discrimination and ensure safeguarding arrangements are of the highest quality. Staff are conscientious in ensuring policies are rigorously implemented so they have a positive impact on school and students' life, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. For example, risk assessments are exemplary and ensure that students, particularly those with medical conditions, can play a full part in the everyday life of the school. Strong partnerships with other schools and colleges, those with other agencies and also with parents and carers provide high levels of support, particularly to students' personal development.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



22 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Rivermead School, Gillingham ME7 1UG

Thank you for all the help and support you gave us when we came to inspect Rivermead School. We were particularly pleased to be able to talk with so many of you.

We judge Rivermead to be a good school where all staff go out of their way to help you achieve well. Some of you told us, and we could see as we went round the school, that everyone helps you to make great improvements in managing your own behaviour and improving your attitudes to school. You particularly enjoy the annual residential when you can rock climb and sail small boats. The support which staff provide is extremely effective in helping you to develop communication, literacy and numeracy skills which you can use in other subjects. The school provides a very safe and secure environment and you help and support each other very well.

To make Rivermead even better we have asked teachers to ensure that all lessons use the widest range of teaching approaches so that each of you achieves as well as you can. We also want those who lead the subjects you study to take more responsibility for ensuring that the provision in every subject area is of the highest quality.

You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and so we know you will continue to do your best at all times.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Charlton
Lead inspector

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