

Rowan Gate Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131079
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	360204
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anja Sacke
Headteacher	Laura Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2008
School address	Finedon Road Wellingborough NN8 4NS
Telephone number	01933 304970
Fax number	01933 304971
Email address	head@rowangate.northants-ecl.gov.uk

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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, staff focus groups and pupils. They analysed a wide range of evidence including: data on pupils' progress; a sample of statements of special educational needs and individual education plans; curriculum planning; the school's improvement plan; pupils' work; safeguarding policies; feeding plans; two case studies of pupils in vulnerable circumstances; and 45 questionnaire returns from parents and carers.

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

- How much progress is made by groups of pupils with different special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- What use is made of small-stepped assessments to plan specific and relevant learning outcomes for pupils in lessons?
- What is the impact of the school's curriculum programmes on meeting the needs of different disability groups?

Information about the school

Rowan Gate Primary School is a mixed special school, which provides for pupils with significant, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Since the last inspection, there has been a growth in the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. A few pupils have additional hearing impairment and visual impairment needs and a significant number have very complex medical needs. There has been an increase in the number of pupils on roll since the last inspection as well as in the complexity of pupils' needs. The school has Early Years Foundation Stage provision for 19 children. Almost all of these children have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Throughout the rest of the school, every pupil has a statement of special education needs and/or disabilities. There are significantly more boys than girls on roll. Almost all pupils are White British and very few are from families where English is not the first language. Pupils travel daily from a wide area over Northamptonshire to attend this school, which is rapidly increasing in popularity amongst parents and carers. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. There are three looked after children and a few Traveller children.

The school provides outreach to mainstream schools. Extended services include after-school provision three evenings each week in term time and a play scheme which runs in the summer holidays for two weeks. There is a parent liaison teacher who works to support parents and carers and pupils in the home setting as well as providing opportunities for adult education such as sign language and cookery. She leads parenting classes.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Rowan Gate Primary School provides an outstanding quality of education and care. An outstanding vision driven by the headteacher and translated into classroom practice, embraced by all staff, ensures that every barrier to learning for pupils with disabilities is removed. Highly personalised teaching programmes, the implementation of innovative curriculum packages following detailed research, and effective coordinated working between health professionals and educational staff ensure each pupil succeeds within his or her capability.

Achievement is outstanding. Specialist tailored programmes significantly improve pupils' communication, independence and mobility skills. Pupils' adoption of a safe and healthy lifestyle is outstanding. Teaching is outstanding. Lessons are planned exceptionally well to meet the needs of each pupil. Pupils achieve their challenging planned learning outcomes through every lesson and delight in their successes. Activities are exceptionally well matched to pupils' needs and a wide range of suitable teaching methods are used. In classes for pupils with autism, there are clear schedules supported by pictures and structured individual work stations, which significantly accelerate pupils' learning. Sensory resources and very effective intensive interaction methods are used for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Teachers know how to carry out functional visual assessments as required and use these very effectively to meet the needs of pupils with visual impairments. Sensory profiling is used to ensure pupils are comfortable and pupils' preferred learning styles inform teachers' planning to raise their achievement. Robust and effective monitoring of the quality of teaching, together with feedback and targeted professional development, has significantly improved the quality of teaching throughout the school over the past few years.

Distributed leadership, promoted by the headteacher, is highly effective. All staff engage in deeply reflective analysis of every aspect of their performance and this is a key feature in the success of this school. This school is exceptionally well led and managed. There is a sharp focus on promoting excellence in learning and so raising pupils' achievement. Self-evaluation is used to prompt decisive action to bring about improvements. For example, data analysis a year ago showed that achievement in reading was not good enough to meet this school's high standards. Decisive change was implemented through the launch of a new reading scheme, which has significantly raised pupils' achievement in reading. Never complacent, the senior leadership team is currently exploring how it can best engage pupils in the evaluation of the quality of the teaching they receive so as to gain data on how to improve the school's already very high quality of teaching. Given the impressive success of actions to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Better engage the pupils in the evaluation of their teaching and learning so that teachers can evaluate how pupils learn most effectively and improve their planning to raise achievement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

All groups of pupils make rapid gains in learning in lessons because activities are exceptionally well planned to meet their needs. Teachers use the goals in individual educational plans effectively in planning their lessons and so pupils make mountainous leaps in what is immediately important in their next steps of development. For one pupil, for example, this is overcoming the reluctance to touch a messy substance, for another, reaching out for the first time with the left hand and for another, tracking a light line in the sensory room. Achievement over time from very low starting points is outstanding. Scrutiny of the National Progression Guidance data shows that all pupils in 2010 between Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2 made or exceeded the expected progress in mathematics and the very large majority did so in English. The implementation of schemes following meticulous research contributes to pupils' outstanding progress. For example, the scheme for Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters results in pupils with autism improving their unprompted communication and skills of making independent choices. A new graded reading scheme results in all pupils making rapid progress dependent on their capability, ranging from improved reading through eye gazing, interpreting symbols to comprehending printed text at National Curriculum Level 2. Other data sets held by the school show that there is no significant difference in the progress of the different disability groups or between boys and girls.

Pupils enjoy school and engage enthusiastically with learning, as reflected by their above-average attendance. Their behaviour is outstanding. The improvement in behaviour over time made by pupils with autism as their communication skills improve is impressive. In each class, pupils decide upon the rules to be implemented to keep safe and with help from their class teachers they shape the school's anti-bullying policy. Pupils participate enthusiastically in physical exercise and they know why it is important to eat healthy foods. They learn to grieve in the school's memorial garden when they remember the death of a peer and pay careful attention to their emotional health through this grieving process. Through the class councils and school council, pupils exercise their voice and make a valuable contribution to school improvement. Older pupils take on responsibility for looking after younger pupils in the playground and they initiate fund raising activities to support the wider community. Through enterprise projects linked to growing flowers and vegetables in the school garden, they learn to set up stalls, price and sell their produce. Their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, within their capability, are exceptionally well developed. Pupils reflect in the sensory garden, bow their heads quietly through prayer times, gaze with fascination at bubbles in the sensory room and follow the school's sensory trails with wonder and awe in their eyes. They understand each other's feelings and values. Their understanding of cultural diversity is rich as they participate in Indian dance, visit a Hindu temple and engage in multicultural art projects.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is relevant to pupils' needs, challenging, and successfully engages their interest. Exceptionally effective teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants ensures skilful behaviour management, particularly of pupils with autism. Consequently, these pupils engage with activities, which accelerate their learning. Teaching methods vary according to the disability groups but in all lessons very effective use is made of small-stepped assessments to plan specific learning outcomes to meet pupils' personal and academic learning needs. As a result of teachers meticulously using assessments lesson by lesson to realign their planning and match work to pupils' needs they make outstanding progress. Transition for pupils after being together is smooth and each small group works on activities to move them forward in their learning at a pace appropriate to their needs. Activities vary from using a big electrical switch to respond to a question, to solving a mathematical problem independently and writing a sentence with well-shaped letters and accurate spelling, depending on the capability of the pupil.

The outstanding personalised curriculum meets pupils' needs exceptionally well. Specific disability and subject expertise, combined with an extensive range of electronic resources, enables the school to provide an exceptionally broad and relevant curriculum. Innovative practice, particularly in working with pupils with autism and differentiating reading for

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pupils with a wide range of disabilities, is at the cutting edge. Such practice significantly benefits pupils' development of independent communication skills and removes barriers to their learning as they begin to access learning through interpreting pictures, symbols and text. Modified literacy and numeracy programmes enable both low functioning and high functioning pupils, within the context of this school, to reach their full potential; for example, the few pupils who reach National Curriculum Level 2 have inclusion opportunities in mainstream primary schools. Therapy is integral to the curriculum and music therapy has supported pupils with challenging behaviour to engage better with learning. The personal, social and health education programme is outstanding and equips pupils with important life skills such as learning how to shop, manage money and cook a healthy meal on a tight budget.

Outstanding collaborative working and communication between social service staff, educational staff and health professionals ensure that pupils' care needs are exceptionally well met. For example, therapists devise feeding programmes, which successfully promote pupils' skills to feed independently. Careful positioning and sensory profiling enable barriers to learning to be removed for pupils with autism. Every opportunity is maximised to promote pupils' independence in mobility. Families are exceptionally well supported. Currently the Confident Parenting Strategy supports parents and carers in managing their children's challenging behaviour and in helping them to learn. The summer play scheme run as part of the extended services provision during the summer holidays offers very valuable respite for parents and carers. Pupils' induction into the school is excellent. Every child is seen in his or her home setting before admission and objects of interest in the home setting are used in school to motivate learning, yet skilfully weaning pupils away from obsessive patterns of behaviour. Higher-functioning pupils are successfully integrated in mainstream schools as appropriate and transition arrangements to secondary education are excellent. Parents and carers are fully and sensitively involved in setting their children's individual education plan targets, which guide them in enhancing their children's learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, in partnership with an exceptionally effective staff team, promotes drive and ambition which focuses on removing obstacles to learning for pupils with a wide range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. All staff embrace a commitment to ensure each pupil learns as well as possible and achieves her or his very best. The school analyses data rigorously, conducts research and implements strategies to raise pupils' achievement. Leadership responsibilities are shared by all staff and subject leaders

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are important in this process. The combined decisive action of the whole staff team results in pupils with autism making breakthroughs in their communication, being more settled in their behaviour and all groups of pupils improving their reading, writing and mathematical skills. In this school, equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination lie at the heart of its work and disability is never accepted as a barrier to becoming successful. Monitoring of teaching and learning, shared by senior leaders and subject leaders, is very robust and used to effect change and raise pupils' achievement. The school has an exceptionally clear self-evaluation framework, which includes the teachers' performance management cycle. Feedback from lesson observations supports teachers in improving their teaching.

Outstandingly effective management systems and procedures ensure that pupils are safe and secure. Child protection procedures at the time of the inspection were extremely effective. Risk assessments, including of specialist resources such as hoists and slings to lift pupils, are exceptionally thorough and detailed. Pupils' complex medical and behavioural needs are outlined in detailed individual plans. Partnerships with local businesses enrich the curriculum and enhance pupils' learning. A local company services the school's mini buses free of charge, which are used to take the pupils on relevant field trips and a local bank funds the school's garden project. The link with parents and carers is excellent. Parents' and carers' views are heard and acted upon and communication through the home-school books is excellent. The regular Thursday morning pre-school parents' and carers' meeting support those who will be sending their children to the school.

Community cohesion is outstanding. An excellent action plan, set and evaluated within the pupils' capabilities, promotes comprehensive understanding among pupils of their local, as well as national and global disability communities. Governance is outstanding. A highly skilled and knowledgeable team of governors use their expertise to support and offer constructive challenge to the headteacher. Their work on the new emerging equality plan is outstanding.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children are placed in the Early Years Foundation Stage following initiated action by a health visitor, pre-school settings or the local authority's Early Years special needs coordinators. Almost all children have a statement for their special educational needs, but on rare occasions children are placed while undergoing a statutory assessment. There are two classes: one for children on the autistic spectrum and another for children with severe learning difficulties. Children's special educational needs and/or disabilities, and associated challenging behaviours linked to their frustration at not being able to communicate their needs, are very complex. Children often start in the setting with no behavioural boundaries, unable to play with friends or take turns when playing with toys and with limited or no speech. They make outstanding progress and by the time they reach statutory school age, their attention span has increased so they are more ready to learn. Their communication skills improve significantly and they are far more independent in putting their coats on and feeding themselves.

The quality of teaching, curriculum and care the children receive are all outstanding. Excellent use is made of a stimulating outdoor play area to support children's communication, mathematical and physical development skills. Using pictures on their schedules they choose when they want to learn outdoors and have free-flow access to this excellent outdoor resource. The staff team regularly and frequently assess children's development and immediately use the assessments to realign their planning and modify resources to accelerate children's development and learning. Observing a child's reluctance to use her left hand she was re-positioned and a toy was placed within her reach on her left side. She immediately reached out her left hand to explore the toy. Teachers encourage children to learn through their interests. For example, a child's interest in action toys was developed into a role play activity, which engaged a group of

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children. Together, their language and mathematical skills were developed well through this exciting and fun activity.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Critical self-evaluation and resultant decisive action for improvement pervade the Early Years Foundation Stage. Work with parents and carers is highly effective. They are involved in setting targets linked to significant developments for their children, such as taking turns, improving the quality of sleeping patterns for their children, and increasing attention spans and communication skills.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Returns from questionnaires indicate that the vast majority of parents and carers are pleased with all the school achieves for their children. They submitted an extensive number of notes for inspectors, which were full of praise for the school. In particular, they are delighted with the progress their children make and the manner in which the school meets their children's needs. Inspection evidence corroborates parents' and carers' positive views of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rowan Gate Primary 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 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 112 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	80	9	20	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	84	7	16	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	39	87	6	13	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	76	10	22	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	38	84	5	11	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	73	12	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	71	13	29	0	0	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)	29	64	10	22	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	84	6	13	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	73	10	22	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	71	12	27	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	39	87	5	11	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	91	3	7	1	2	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.



18 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rowan Gate Primary School, Wellingborough, NN8 4NS

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. You are exceptionally well cared for and you are enabled to be successful, particularly in expressing your needs and becoming independent. You are enabled to do things for yourselves like go shopping, cook healthy foods, and dress yourselves. You read really well and are enabled to solve real life mathematical problems. Your school is outstanding.

Here are the main things we found.

Your lessons are challenging, fun and relevant and they meet your needs exceptionally well.

You experience activities which enable you to develop important life skills.

Barriers to learning are removed for you and so you achieve very well, particularly, in expressing your needs and solving mathematical problems when you shop and work in the school's garden.

You enjoy school and your behaviour and the interest you show in learning are excellent.

You are involved in decision making about how your school is run for you.

You understand the importance of keeping yourselves safe and healthy and the way in which you support each other is fantastic.

Your headteacher and staff lead and manage your school exceptionally well.

We have asked your headteacher to continue to explore how best to involve you in saying more clearly what helps you to best learn in your lessons so that she can use what you have to say to make your lessons even more challenging and fun for you than they already are.

Yours sincerely

Jeffery Plumb

Lead Inspector

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