

Rowan Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104983
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	355672
Inspection dates	11–12 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Hilary Ward

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Val Healy
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	26 September 2007
School address	Sterrix Lane Litherland, Bootle Merseyside L21 0DB
Telephone number	0151 222 4894
Fax number	0151 288 2020
Email address	head.rowanpark@schools.sefton.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Sixteen lessons and 15 teachers were observed. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, with parents and carers, therapists, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documents relating to safeguarding, curriculum, pupil and student progress and school development planning. The inspectors reviewed 66 parents' and carers' questionnaires and questionnaire responses from pupils, students and staff.

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

- The impact that continuing professional development has on raising pupils' basic skills, especially in literacy, since the last inspection.
- Whether the involvement of parents and carers and multi-disciplinary professionals is effective.
- The development of the role of the governing body and the contribution governors make to school improvement.
- The impact of partnerships in increasing opportunities for pupils' personal and academic development.

Information about the school

Rowan Park School is a large all-age special school for pupils with severe and complex special educational needs. Provision includes specialist support for those with autism spectrum conditions and for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties with visual impairment. Pupils are admitted into the Early Years Foundation Stage and they also join at times other than the usual admission to schools, particularly at the beginning of the secondary and post-16 phases. Pupils are drawn from across the borough of Sefton and are predominantly White British. All have a statement of special educational needs and 42% are known to be eligible for free school meals. Two thirds of the school population are boys.

The school staff provide specialist support to local mainstream schools and to Sefton advisory and inclusion service on request. The school holds a number of awards including Investors in People, Artsmark, Healthy Schools, Extended Schools and International Schools (Foundation Level). They are currently working towards Green Flag for sustainability.

At the time of the inspection, the school was contributing to plans for a new college for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although it is anticipated that Rowan Park will also continue to make provision for students in the sixth form.

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 Park is an exceptional school. Every aspect of its work is outstanding. It has continued to build on previous excellent inspection findings as an outstandingly effective provider. Provision is exemplary and the excellent curriculum and highly effective teaching enable pupils to make at least good and, more often, outstanding progress in their personal and academic development. The exceptionally high quality of care, guidance and support offered by teachers, teaching assistants, multi-disciplinary professionals and non-teaching staff ensures importance is paid to every aspect of pupils' well-being. The development of communication and social skills underpins everything the school does and increases pupils' independent learning. This is supported by the use of a wide range of communication strategies to meet the needs of individuals.

The school is a very happy place. Under the inspirational direction of the headteacher, all staff have high expectations for their pupils. The outstanding leadership of teaching and learning is based on rigorous monitoring and support to develop professional skills. Staff share an excellent knowledge of the way in which children with various special educational needs and/or disabilities learn and apply this to their meticulous lesson planning. The school has further improved the way it analyses pupils' progress to measure its effectiveness and shares this excellent practice with other providers. The rich and diverse curriculum contributes to pupils' enthusiasm for learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent as is reflected in the warm and purposeful atmosphere. Safeguarding is outstanding and pupils feel very safe in school and have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives. Behaviour is exemplary. Staff give clear guidance to those who may have difficulty sustaining good behaviour so that they learn to successfully manage their own behaviour. The school is a very cohesive community and pupils care for each other and make a positive contribution to the life of the school. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the exceptional level of support given to them and their families as well as to their children. A typical comment was, 'All the people who work here are wonderful and patient and caring, they have helped us so much.' Very strong partnerships also exist with a range of agencies and other schools and these contribute to pupils' understanding of their local community and the wider world.

School leaders and the exceptionally well involved governing body have a keen and critical view of every aspect of the school and how the school's work affects the excellent outcomes. This results in first rate self-evaluation, which ensures the school is not complacent. Recent changes include adjustments to the already outstanding provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Separate classes have been created for the youngest children with autism spectrum conditions and those who have severe and profound learning difficulties to more effectively meet their differing needs. However, at

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the moment the class of children with autism can only access the outdoor provision with support, which lessens their opportunities for independent learning. Another demonstration of the desire to offer the very best is senior leaders' involvement in the planning of a new local authority college for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Forward – thinking school leaders see this as an opportunity to enhance the already excellent curriculum. This clarity of vision shows a shared commitment to continue to grow and demonstrates an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve access to the curriculum by:
 - continuing to be involved in the planning for a new college to ensure that opportunities to extend the school's own curriculum are not missed
 - improving independent access to the outdoor provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage class for those children with autism spectrum conditions by September 2011.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In a very happy and safe environment, where routines are well understood and provide a supportive framework, pupils flourish. Due to the nature of their special educational needs and/or disabilities attainment compared to mainstream schools cannot be judged. However, pupils make excellent progress from their overall very low starting points, taking into account the barriers to their learning. They frequently exceed the challenging targets the school sets for them. This is verified by the moderation work undertaken with other special schools and by national benchmarking which shows improved achievements year-on-year compared with similar schools. The different groups of pupils make equally outstanding progress because the highly trained, knowledgeable staff understand how to plan the curriculum and lessons to ensure every individual is able to achieve the best that they can. Assisted by a range of verbal prompts, signs, symbols, switches and electronic communication aids, the vast majority of pupils make outstanding progress in communication. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, especially those with visual impairments, show this by smiling, stilling and turning towards sounds they recognise and to familiar voices. Pupils with autism quickly develop communication strategies which enable them to express their needs and wishes calmly. Improving communication supports the development of the excellent behaviour seen. Higher ability pupils learn to recognise words and some use them in their writing. In more than one lesson, pupils were learning to count through number songs with real objects, although one pupil ate his currant bun which did not help the counting! Since the last inspection, the school has improved the range of external awards available. All students now attain accreditation and attend an award ceremony at the Cathedral, where they are presented with a certificate to celebrate their success.

In spite of their variable physical abilities, all pupils participate in and enjoy a range of sporting activities which are well matched to their needs and interests, such as swimming and horse riding, mobility and hydrotherapy sessions. They understand the importance of keeping healthy through the provision of fruit and toast at snack times and using healthy

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food in cookery lessons. At these times, pupils also learn the important social skills of sitting together, requesting their choices, taking-turn and saying or indicating 'please' and 'thank you'. The members of the school council are proud of some of the mini-enterprise fundraising activities they have led such as designing aprons to sell. Funds are raised both for the school and for a wide range of charities. Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities relevant to their interests and abilities. They learn to be tolerant and supportive of each other and learn about other cultures and people through their links in the local community, with other countries and through receiving visitors as part of achieving the International Schools award. Attendance is high because pupils love to come to school and any absences are for medical reasons.

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	1
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 never less than good and most often it is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants have an excellent understanding of their pupils' individual needs as a result of their continuous rigorous assessment. Class teams and therapists work together extremely closely to plan individual learning objectives for every lesson which reflect the challenging targets in pupils' individual education plans. Teachers are very knowledgeable about the way that pupils learn due to the support they receive through their continuing professional

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development. They are skilled at capturing pupils' interest through highly imaginative, often multi-sensory lessons. They know how to make learning really enjoyable. For instance, in one lesson, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties thoroughly enjoyed the experience of feeling they were in a rain forest. They experienced visual images and sound effects, soft animal snakes and butterflies, steam rising and water spraying on them, pineapples and bananas to taste and smell, rubber plants and exotics to feel. In another lesson for pupils with autism, they listened to a story about a pizza and then made their own, being encouraged to taste, smell and feel the ingredients before making their choices.

At each key stage the outstanding curriculum is adapted to offer rich experiences correctly linked to different ages and abilities. A wide range of opportunities are presented through off-site learning, often with mainstream peers, and by a wealth of visits and visitors into school. Outdoor learning opportunities are created very imaginatively in the newly-developed forest school.

Staff at all levels work together with multi-disciplinary professionals and with parents and carers as highly effective teams to offer outstandingly consistent care, guidance and support. They meet individual pupils' emotional, health and welfare needs exceptionally well, helping them to overcome the significant barriers to their learning and become more independent.

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's inspirational vision has united the school in a common purpose and direction. This is shared by the outstandingly effective governing body which is knowledgeable, supportive and challenging. In its focus on meeting the holistic needs of each pupil, the school is wholly inclusive and strongly promotes equal opportunities for every individual. There are high expectations for pupils' achievement in all aspects of their development. All successes are celebrated and leaders and managers at all levels are constantly seeking ways in which they can improve the provision to create greater opportunities for success. Monitoring of all aspects of the school's work by leaders and managers is rigorous and this results in highly effective self-evaluation. All staff are involved in contributing to school improvement. The school is outward looking and innovative and shares its excellent practice through partnerships with other special schools, with mainstream schools and colleges, with external agencies and with a host of other providers in the community. This promotes community cohesion exceptionally well as evidenced by the achievement of the International Schools award (Foundation Level).

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Partnerships with parents and carers are particularly strong. As a result, parents and carers feel very well informed about their children's learning and progress and share information with staff to ensure their children's well-being. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are excellent and an example of best policy and practice.

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 make outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal and social development and in their communication. Before a child joins the setting, staff visit the home or other childcare setting and plan for transition very carefully with parents and carers and other professionals. The school has recently divided the increasing number of children entering the setting into two groups to better meet the learning needs of children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties or with autism spectrum conditions. This enables the curriculum to be planned in a highly appropriate way to meet the differing needs. High quality support is provided by medical professionals and by additionally trained staff as necessary. The creation of a new class has reduced independent access for the group with autism to the outdoor provision; the school has plans to improve this.

Children are happy and quickly gain in confidence through experiential learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led through the shared management structure and by teachers who are very experienced and knowledgeable. Parents and carers and other professionals are involved in the continual assessment which then informs planning for children's next steps. The learning environment is very safe and nurturing.

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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

Sixth form

Outcomes for students in the sixth form are also outstanding. All are able to gain externally recognised accreditations in excess of those that could be expected. Different progression routes are carefully planned so that all, whatever their special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included and able to succeed. Many learning activities take place off-site. For example, students attend sector colleges and enjoy sessions at the local sports facility. Teachers plan high quality lessons and learning experiences. Great attention is paid to continuous assessment and ensuring students know how well they are doing and what they need to do further to gain awards. The curriculum is extremely well supported by a wide range of enrichment activities to meet individual interests, such as horse riding and theatre work. Students gain valuable independence and the life skills needed to move on to the next stage in their lives. They become confident learners and begin to understand about the world of work. The local authority has plans to create a new college for post-16 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders and managers are fully involved in the planning, recognising the increased curriculum opportunities this will provide for the school's own sixth form.

Students enjoy high quality relationships with staff and feel very safe and, as a result, behaviour is exemplary. They enjoy increased opportunities to take on roles of responsibility within the school and local community. Leaders and managers of the sixth form work hard to provide new and creative opportunities for students. Close attention is paid by multi-disciplinary teams, not only to academic success, but to the welfare and safeguarding of students. Students enjoy coming to school and, as a result, attendance in the sixth form is high.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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Views of parents and carers

Around half of the parents and carers returned questionnaires. The inspectors also met with a group of parents and carers. All expressed delight with the education and care the school provides for their children. Several commented that their children feel safe and happy and love to come to school. They believe that the school gets the best out of their children because of the consistently high expectations for them. Many parents and carers said that staff 'go the extra mile for both child and family'. When asked if they would like to change anything about the school, the response from one parent was, 'Yes, extend the age range.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rowan Park 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	89	6	9	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	63	95	3	5	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	58	88	8	12	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	80	13	20	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	91	6	9	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	79	14	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	53	80	11	17	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)	49	74	15	23	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	82	12	18	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	79	13	20	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	80	12	18	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	62	94	4	6	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	88	8	12	0	0	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



13 May 2011

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Rowan Park School, Bootle, L21 0DB

We really enjoyed visiting your school and would like to thank you for talking to us and making us feel so welcome. It was clear that you enjoy school very much. You told us that your school is 'fabulous' and we agree with you that it is outstanding in every aspect of its work.

The school has so many strengths that it is difficult to know which ones to mention, but we were particularly pleased with the following:

- lessons are fun and your behaviour and attendance are excellent
- partnerships with your parents, carers and other agencies are outstanding and these make sure you are exceptionally well cared for and make the best progress you possibly can with your learning
- you feel happy and safe, and enjoy excellent relationships with staff and each other.

The school continues to think of ways it can improve all the time. We have asked leaders to ensure that their contribution to the planning for the new sixth form college makes sure that your needs for the future are met. We have also asked them to increase access to outdoor play and exploration for some of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

We feel very sure that your school will continue to go from strength to strength and hope that you will continue to enjoy every day there.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Ward

Lead inspector

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