

# Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool)

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104735
<b>Local Authority</b>	Liverpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	355623
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Linda Clare

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	39
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Leslie Kirsh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr J Byrne
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 October 2007
<b>School address</b>	Church Road North Wavertree, Liverpool Merseyside L15 6TQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. Seven lessons were observed. Seven class teachers were seen. Part-sessions led by the school's mobility and orientation teachers were briefly observed on a learning walk. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documents including information on students' progress, teachers' planning, curricular documents, students' files and the school's self-evaluation. Questionnaires were received from eight parents and carers and the inspectors also read survey responses from the school's staff.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether the learning outcomes planned for each student promote good and better rates of progress.
- The impact of the themed curriculum on students' achievement in core subjects.
- The extent to which students contribute to their learning, are well-prepared for the future and understand cultural diversity.
- How well senior leaders and the governing body monitor and evaluate the work of the school.

## Information about the school

The Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool) is maintained by an independent charity. The school provides for students with varying levels of visual impairment. All have additional and complex learning and/or physical difficulties, including multi-sensory impairment. All students have a statement of special educational needs and boys outnumber girls by two to one. All students are of White British heritage. There is a small number of looked after students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. Students are mainly from Merseyside and the North West. A small number of students come from other parts of England and Wales. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status.

The Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool) also offers weekly boarding and respite provision during term-time, which was not part of this inspection. This was inspected in April 2011 and its provision judged to be good with several outstanding features.

**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

The Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool) is an outstanding school. It has a long and proud history of working with students who have visual impairment. Parents and carers appreciate its warm and welcoming ethos and the total commitment shown by all staff. One parent or carer commented, 'This school is the perfect environment... all the staff are fantastic at communicating and helping children with profound disabilities to develop'. The school is a happy place in which laughter and fun are utilised very effectively to promote learning. The school's commitment to breaking down barriers and promoting equality shines through everything it does.

Students enjoy school very much. 'It's gorgeous!' is how one student described his school, and others agree. Students learn awareness of the company of others in their groups and of trusted adults. All engage in activities to the best of their abilities. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4, students have made outstanding progress in their acquisition of independence and communication skills, developed an excellent range of need-appropriate mobility skills and shown good and better progress in their learning. Experienced staff members are alert to the feelings and needs of non-verbal students and respond quickly and sensitively to their wishes. As a result of the outstanding levels of care, guidance and support provided, students able to verbalise say they feel very safe and can confidently identify who they may turn to for assistance. Students' response to the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles is outstanding. Students make excellent contribution to the school and the local community, particularly through their fundraising activities for charity. They have limited opportunities to meet others from culturally diverse communities. The school's outstanding teaching is underpinned by excellent preparation and planning, precise individual learning goals, a comprehensive range of teaching techniques and superb relationships between staff and students. Multi-disciplinary therapies, learning support and students' personal care arrangements are outstanding. These contribute significantly to students' progress and to the school's outstanding curriculum.

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Learning is extended appropriately through nationally accredited qualifications and a focus on the transition to life after school. Mobility, independence, self-confidence and life-skills are promoted very effectively.

The headteacher and senior managers provide outstanding direction for the school. They are committed to meeting individual student's needs through the highest quality provision. A well-established and very effective system of monitoring leads to clearly focused and detailed development planning. Self-evaluation is accurate. The school knows itself outstandingly well and is constantly striving to improve. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Members of the governing body visit regularly and have good involvement in evaluating the school's progress. A wide range of partnerships enhance students' life and

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learning very effectively and the school fosters productive links with a wide range of community groups and local schools. The high standards found at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained and built upon exceptionally well. As a result, the school has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Extend the school's work to enhance students' experiences of wider and more culturally diverse life styles and communities.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

As a result of their complex visual, physical and learning needs, students enter the school with exceptionally low levels of attainment. The excellent mobility and orientation support they receive enables them to settle very quickly into school life. Students are keen to do well and they try very hard. They show good interest in the activities and stimuli presented and enjoy their learning immensely, as seen in assembly where spontaneous dancing and clapping accompanied the Queen Victoria story. Students make good academic progress from their individual starting points across all key stages and make excellent gains in their personal development.

Students make outstanding progress in the development of their communication skills, reflecting the emphasis on speaking and listening which permeates all lesson-time activities. Progress in English is good, sometimes better at all key stages. Progress in reading improves as students get older and become more proficient at using their favoured multi-sensory access to words. Progress in mathematics is good at all key stages. A whole-school focus on mathematics skills was implemented last year. Current tracking and observations indicate progress to have improved further as a result of the school-wide programme. A good range of courses enable all students to work towards lower level unit awards and pre-entry level national accreditation.

Students use a range of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, including switches to control other equipment. This was seen in a cookery lesson where one student successfully held a food mixer to mix a blueberry cheesecake, whilst another controlled its action using the switch pad. School records show that over time girls and boys make equally good progress from their starting points and there are no differences between groups or across learning needs. Students looked after by local authorities make the same levels of progress as their peers. Students' awareness of healthy lifestyles is excellent and much enhanced by close links with Liverpool Football Club for weekly training, and through a cycling club.

Students show very good respect and genuine care for the needs and difficulties of others. The school council promotes students' views extremely well and in taking its responsibilities seriously, instigated the school's recycling scheme. Students' behaviour is outstanding and this contributes effectively to their good and outstanding progress in learning. Attendance is above average. Life-skills courses, work-related learning and time spent on the school's specialist pavement and precinct mobility 'streets' all superbly complement the acquisition of good and outstanding literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. These skills prepare students very well for the future.

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Cultural awareness is promoted effectively through special weeks and events, for example, pupils learned about life in Africa through a member of staff who had lived there. There is less opportunity for students to work alongside or meet people from more diverse cultural populations.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 at least good and much is outstanding. It is lively and imaginative, groups are very well managed and there is frequent use of praise, encouragement and reassurance. Resources are expertly matched to students' need and activity. Staff have high expectations for their students and promote self-help skills in every lesson. The school's innovative work on combining precise learning outcomes and traditional learning targets produces an exceptionally detailed picture of individual's progress. Assessment targets are linked to National Curriculum levels. The learning outcomes represent very small strands of achievement within these targets and provide superb differentiation. Individual tuition sessions effectively lead to action plans which record the next steps with the student.

The outstanding curriculum is broad and balanced with a skilful combination of themed topic work, core subject lessons, mobility and orientation classes, therapy sessions and

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individual tuition. Outstanding use is made of the school's sensory and soft-play rooms, which students say they enjoy. Music is used very effectively in multi-sensory activities. On-body signing and picture exchange systems very effectively support communication for those with more complex needs. Extensive outdoor play areas include well-designed sensory and water-feature gardens. Travel-training and time on the school road 'circuits' familiarise students with public transport and traffic crossing very effectively. Physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nursing support combine to provide, together with the mobility and orientation team, a model of outstanding provision which is central to the school's excellent care, guidance and support systems. Feeding programmes are managed discretely and with great sensitivity; therapy sessions and the popular mobility classes are timetabled activities. Entry to the school, at any age, is structured and thorough. Good careers advice helps older students and their families to make informed choices about the future.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's outstanding dedication to driving the school forward and sharing his vision for its future promotes equally positive response from the school's staff. Senior managers are committed to the school and provide excellent supporting direction. Together they ensure that equality of opportunity is central to all aspects of the school's functioning. Morale is very high and staff work to a common, shared purpose demonstrating outstanding teamwork. Professional development for all staff is valued and staff are encouraged to extend their skills and expertise.

The management of teaching and learning is outstanding. The school monitors students' progress rigorously and ongoing assessment is analysed efficiently. The school's results compare well against national progression levels for special schools. The teaching of mathematics has improved since the last inspection and progress is now as good as in other core areas. Members of the governing body maintain good contact with the school through visits and residential involvement. They support and challenge the school effectively. Safeguarding is outstanding. The structure for child protection is clear and well displayed. Risks are fully assessed including internet safety and rigorous staff checks are in place. Engagement with parents and carers is outstanding, supported effectively by workshops, home-school diaries and newsletters.

Outstanding partnerships promote music, enterprise and cultural activities, including close links with the Heritage group, working to make public buildings accessible to all. The

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promotion of community cohesion is good. Links with the local community, faith ministers and multi-cultural projects provide students with experiences of life in a diverse society.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils attending the school who were of Early Years Foundation Stage age. Both teachers working with the Early Years Foundation Stage/primary groups are fully trained for the age group.

The learning environment is secured well and contains both indoor and outdoor areas. Both areas are of good size, bright and appropriately resourced for both the age range and complexity of children's needs. Currently one Year 1 pupil and one Year 2 pupil occupy this room.

Planning for this age range is in place and this covers the areas of learning fully.

The manager of the Early Years Foundation Stage has outstanding links with parents and carers. The school's practice of close parental involvement to support the school in identifying children's strengths, interests and abilities prior to entry applies to all Early Years Foundation Stage admissions.



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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
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

The sixth form focuses very effectively on preparing young people for their lives when they leave school. Students show greater maturity as they strive to further their levels of independence and mobility. The new sixth form common room enables students to practice the excellent gains they make in their social and communication skills. Students enjoy the responsibilities of the sixth form.

Teaching is outstanding and tailored to individual need. Individual plans take very good account of personal preferences to develop students' confidence and self-help skills. The outstanding curriculum concentrates on real-life and practical applications of learning. Supported work experience provides a taste of the working world, as students help in the school office, kitchen or with caretaking duties. Students make excellent progress, gaining appropriate and relevant accreditation in 'Towards Independence' and 'Challenge' awards, which recognise small step progression, and in the Adult Basic Skills awards in literacy and numeracy. Citizenship, world studies and an all-encompassing personal, social and health education programme provide depth to their studies. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Post-16 is a secure and mutually supportive group in which self-esteem is promoted exceptionally well.

Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. The organisation, monitoring, tracking and review of students' progress are as detailed and comprehensive as in the main school. Engagement with parents and carers is excellent. Safeguarding is outstanding. The 'German market' enterprise and 'Easter Bingo', fully organised and managed by students, have extended links with the local community very effectively and provide students with an insight of life in a different country.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
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**

A very small number of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Most parents and carers who responded expressed wholly positive views about the school and the education provided for their children. Inspection findings indicate that relationships with parents and carers are outstanding, care, guidance and support are outstanding and there are no aspects identified in the report which are less than good.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool) 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 inspector received 8 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 39 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	88	1	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	7	88	1	13	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	5	63	3	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	4	50	3	38	1	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	50	3	38	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)	5	63	2	25	1	13	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	75	1	13	1	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	63	2	25	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	6	75	1	13	1	13	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](http://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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



21 May 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool), Liverpool L15 6TQ**

Thank you for your help when I visited your school last week. I enjoyed talking with you. The Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool) is an outstanding school. Almost every part of the work of the school was judged to be excellent, which is a great tribute to everyone at your school. Well done! I was pleased to see how much your school helps you, and how well you do in your work. You really try hard and this makes everyone happy, from your parents and carers to your headteacher.

The teachers and support staff look after you really well and your behaviour is excellent. These things will help you to continue to make very good progress in your work. The teaching is outstanding in your school and you have some exciting lessons to go to. I saw some excellent lessons. I particularly liked the one about the space flight when some of you had to keep the spaceship clean. Your dancing and singing in assembly was also very good and the pianist was superb!

Your school is outstanding because your headteacher and the other managers are excellent leaders and they are always trying to make the school better for you. But being outstanding does not mean everything is perfect – there is always room to improve. I have asked your teachers to try to arrange more opportunities for you to visit or work with people who have different life styles or come from different countries. I am really pleased that you have such an excellent school to go to. I hope that you will all help your teachers by trying as hard as you have been and that you continue to enjoy everything that you do there.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Clare

Lead Inspector

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