

Richmond Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109743
Local Authority	Luton
Inspection number	377977
Inspection dates	13–14 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Leslie Robertson
Headteacher	Jill Miller
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Fourteen lessons were observed taught by 13 teachers and specialist teaching assistants, and lunch and break times were visited. Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body and members of staff. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including safeguarding policies, procedures and records; records of pupils' progress; curriculum planning and initiatives; and various documents relating to pupils' personal development and the care and support offered by the school. Sixty-four inspection questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed, along with those returned by staff and pupils.

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

- How effective is the governance of the school?
- What is the quality of provision for pupils with the most complex needs?
- Do all groups of pupils make comparable progress and are the targets set for individuals sufficiently challenging?
- How well are pupils' speaking and listening skills promoted through the everyday work of the school?

Information about the school

Richmond Hill is about average in size for this type of school, but the number of pupils on roll is increasing steadily year on year. Some new building work to increase the size of the school is due to commence shortly. The great majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties, with about one pupil in ten experiencing very profound difficulties and challenging behaviour. These pupils are relatively new in this school, but their numbers are increasing. The proportion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders is also increasing steadily, and is now approximately 60% of the school population. There are nearly three times as many boys as girls which is typical for this type of school. Most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with Asian/Asian British - Pakistani pupils forming the largest group in the school, and Black/Black British African and White British forming the next two largest groups. Pupils from eight other ethnic groups form the rest of the school population and nearly 70% of the school speak English as an additional language, which is a much higher proportion than normally found. Around one third of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is about twice the national average. The school has had National Healthy Schools status since 2004 and has recently been re-awarded with Investors in Families.

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

2

Main findings

Richmond Hill is an outstanding school that has improved since the previous inspection. The senior leaders and all staff have a strong commitment to providing the very best education and care for the pupils. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very happy with the school and their children's outstanding outcomes. The school is not complacent about its many strengths. Self-evaluation and the analysis of performance data are robust. They have accurately identified that the progress of pupils with the most severe and complex needs, although satisfactory, is not as rapid as the other groups of pupils in the school. This has already led to a change in class organisation for this year, further curriculum development, and the identification of staff training needs.

The school is committed to innovation and development to give pupils enjoyable and memorable experiences. Since the previous inspection, this has led to the implementation of an outstanding, creative curriculum with numerous valuable developments. For example, a vegetable garden has been constructed, in partnership with a commercial building firm, the Prince's Trust and mainstream school leavers who are not in employment, education or training. This excellent resource is used to underpin many curriculum activities. It also exemplifies the school's outstanding partnerships in support of pupils' learning and well-being, and its commitment to supporting the wider community. The use of information and communication technology to enhance and support the curriculum is outstanding. Pupils' work, such as self-narrated and illustrated home-made books, and videos of their activities are placed on 'Richmond Hill TV' and are freely accessible to them, their parents and carers and extended families overseas.

Although progress is good in the school as a whole, nearly half of the pupils make outstanding academic progress. This is due to the creative curriculum and outstanding use of assessment to support and track their learning. These areas are both significantly improved since the previous inspection. The school sets challenging targets for pupils, and their progress is such that a few return to mainstream each year. The quality of teaching is good; the quality of half the teaching observed was outstanding. However, a common feature of less effective lessons was that the provision for the lower-attaining pupils with the most complex needs did not always fully meet their needs throughout the lesson. All aspects of pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, are outstanding and contribute strongly to their overall outstanding outcomes. This is due to the high quality of care, guidance and support, underpinned by outstanding relationships with parents and carers and

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the excellent work of the specialist family worker.

Most aspects of leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and her deputy have very successfully inspired and motivated staff at all levels to be ambitious for the pupils and to provide high quality education and care. The outstanding safeguarding procedures are wide reaching, and the school's partnerships and contribution to the local and wider communities are outstanding. However, as identified in the previous inspection, governance is weak. Members still do not sufficiently hold the school to account for its performance. Consequently, the governing body does not contribute to school evaluation and development at a high enough level. This affects the school's capacity for sustained improvement, which is judged to be good rather than outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance so that members:
 - provide higher levels of professional challenge to hold the school to account for its performance and pupils' outcomes
 - are more fully and systematically involved in evaluating the school's work.

- Improve the provision for pupils with the most complex needs so that their achievement matches that of their peers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The great majority are lively, happy and confident. They enjoy school and are enthusiastic about learning. Pupils have outstanding, trusting relationships with school staff, and are accepting and supportive of one another, taking pleasure in each other's successes. The pupils very much enjoy learning and their enthusiasm is readily seen in class. For example, on one occasion, older pupils were given total freedom to 'prowl' around the classroom like lions, using musical instruments to make lion-like sounds. They did this happily and entirely sensibly, stopping to watch one another immediately they were asked. On another occasion, pupils practised and improved their ball and co-ordination skills in the hall with great enjoyment, a healthy degree of competitiveness and exemplary behaviour. Pupils say they feel safe at school, and all parents and carers agree that the school helps their children to lead a healthy lifestyle. This is reflected in the school's Healthy Schools status. There are very few incidents of bullying or harassment, and challenging behaviour is expertly and calmly dealt with. Evidence shows that this decreases rapidly as a result. Pupils' cultural development is outstanding because of the school's inclusive ethos and ongoing celebration of its rich, diverse community.

Pupils' academic achievement is good. Forty-five percent of pupils make outstanding progress in the five core subjects of the curriculum, and a further 34% make good progress. The remaining pupils make satisfactory progress overall, although a few

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with the most complex needs make more limited progress. This is often because of chronic medical needs and illness. This difference is already being addressed by the school. Analysis of assessment information shows no difference in the progress of other groups, such as those from different ethnic heritages, with English as an additional language or with autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in information and communication technology which is creatively integrated into all areas of the curriculum. The school’s drive to improve pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills since the previous inspection has been very effective. Higher-attaining pupils learn to read simple books, and to write words and sentences. Middle and some lower-attaining pupils learn to recognise words and express their wants and views verbally, and through signing and symbols. Progress in science is less marked, and is being addressed through curriculum development. Preparation for pupils’ future well-being is outstanding and they are very well prepared for their move to secondary school.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	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	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good overall, although a substantial amount is outstanding. Particularly notable features of these highly effective lessons are:

- a relaxed, fun-filled atmosphere in which pupils are encouraged to be active participants, for example copying each other’s chosen ‘talents’ such as wriggling on their tummies while shouting ‘I can do it!’
- tasks that are set to help pupils practise what they already know and challenge

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.

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- them to do more
- tasks that closely match each pupil's individual needs, based on careful assessment of their skills
 - plenty of opportunity for pupils to listen carefully and provide full answers, which also enables staff to check their understanding
 - the provision of support that empowers pupils, but does not overpower them.

Where teaching is less effective, staff are not always able to fully meet the needs of the most complex pupils. While assessment of their skills is accurate and allows appropriate targets to be set, the teaching methodology is not always sufficiently helpful. For example, physical tasks such as placing objects in a container are not always set out clearly enough so that pupils know when they have completed the task and earned their reward. On one occasion, a pupil was not effectively supported to make a choice, as the range of materials presented was too great and items were not well enough displayed.

Assessment to support learning is outstanding. The school has implemented its own system that allows staff to assess and track pupils' developing skills in fine detail. This is supplemented by regular discussions between staff teams. Learning targets are derived directly from this information so that work can be targeted precisely to pupils' needs.

The curriculum is exciting and highly relevant to pupils' age and interests. The creative approach is taught through very well planned half-termly topics. These combine units of work taken from national schemes and guidance with additional cross-curricular work, activities and visits. The subject emphasis in each topic is different which ensures full coverage of all the required subjects. Art and information and communication technology are used very well to illustrate pupils' work, which is frequently produced in very well presented topic books. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of partnerships, visits and visitors, such as musicians and artists in residence. Provision for personal development and communication are central to the curriculum. They are reinforced throughout the day, and symbols, signing and pictures are increasingly used to support communication and understanding.

The support, care and guidance given to pupils and their families are outstanding, as demonstrated in the Investors in Families award. Staff recognise that pupils' well-being is central to their overall achievement. The family worker supports individual pupils and families in need, for example, linking them with appropriate external agencies and accompanying them on visits to professionals. Help and guidance are given to parents and carers on matters such as their children's toilet training, diet and communication. A current focus of the school's work is to support parents and carers further to help their child's learning at home. The school promotes good attendance very effectively, and the occasional unexplained absence is vigorously pursued. Transition arrangements into and out of school are carefully planned, and visits are made to each pupil in their current school or home setting before they start at Richmond Hill. Pupils' safety, welfare and health are rigorously addressed. Individual behaviour plans are detailed and outline strategies specific to the pupil.

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These support pupils to manage their own behaviour more effectively. As a result, the school is a calm and happy place and behaviour is outstanding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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 and her deputy form a strong and highly effective partnership. Their enthusiasm and drive for high quality thorough self-evaluation, improvement and development are clearly evident throughout the school. The overwhelming majority of staff are happy with and proud of the school and keen to develop professionally. Individuals are valued and encouraged to be innovative and take responsibility. This, for example, has led to the appointment of specialist teaching assistants for subjects such as drama, gardening, physical education and information and communication technology. The work of these people is highly valued and contributes significantly to pupils’ outstanding outcomes.

Middle managers play an important role in the leadership and management of teaching and learning. They make a significant contribution to the robust self-evaluation processes. Information from ongoing assessment is used to inform the whole-school systems that check on pupils’ progress and enable challenging targets to be set for each one. The school’s assessments and data are moderated by a group of staff from neighbouring local authority special schools which ensures their accuracy and challenge. Accurate and honest data analysis ensures that any differences in performance are identified and strategies implemented to remedy them. In the same way, the school monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of its policies and practices. This ensures that there is no discrimination and that all pupils have equal opportunities for learning and well-being.

The school’s safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Work in this area extends much more widely than meeting statutory duties, for example, including safeguarding within the family. All practices are regularly reviewed with a view to improvement. Staff are vigilant to individuals’ needs and any changes in their behaviour. Any concerns are followed up immediately. Staying safe and healthy are important foci in the curriculum, with topics ranging from healthy eating to ‘stranger danger’. ‘Circle time’ gives pupils the opportunities to talk through any difficulties and to reinforce issues such as anti-bullying and racism. The school makes an outstanding contribution to promoting community cohesion. It understands its own community very well, and this is reflected in its everyday work. For example, pupils’

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made vegetable curry with school-grown vegetables during the inspection which reflects the food typically eaten at home. The use of 'Richmond Hill TV' allows parents and families abroad to appreciate what their children are doing in school better than a description in words. The school provides training and outreach support to colleagues in mainstream schools and initiatives such as the innovative use of information and communication technology are used as exemplars of good practice at a national level.

Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is highly supportive of the school and diligent in ensuring the robustness of financial and site matters. Members visit the school and understand its strengths. However, they do not offer sufficient professional challenge in relation to the school's performance and value for money in terms of pupils' outcomes. Consequently, the drive for raising standards stems mainly from the school staff and this somewhat limits the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

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	3
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

Views of parents and carers

Eighty-one percent of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire, which is a much higher return than typically found. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers gave a positive response to all 13 statements, and there were just one or two negative responses to a few of the statements. The inspection team agreed with the positive views of parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Richmond Hill 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 64 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 79 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	70	19	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	39	61	23	36	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	43	67	20	31	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	52	29	45	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	38	59	24	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	29	45	34	53	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	42	36	56	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)	25	39	33	52	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	37	58	24	38	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	55	23	36	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	50	29	45	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	63	22	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	45	70	18	28	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



15 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Richmond Hill School, Luton, LU2 7JL

Thank you very much for your warm and friendly welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you, sitting in on your lessons and seeing how well you are all doing. We are delighted to tell you that Richmond Hill is an outstanding school. It has a great number of outstanding features. These include:

- your personal development and excellent behaviour
- the progress that the great majority of you make
- the exciting curriculum and interesting developments, such as the school garden and the use of information and communication technology
- the way that staff check on your progress, so that they can help you achieve more
- the care, guidance and support offered to you and your families by the staff and the family worker
- the way that the school staff are always trying out new ideas to help you learn even better
- the school's leaders, who work hard to make the school as good as it is and to develop it further.

We have asked the school to do two things to become even better. These are:

- to help those with the most complex needs to achieve as well as the rest of you
- to improve the work of the governing body, so that they can give more help to the senior staff to improve and develop the school further.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth
Lead inspector

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