

Riverwalk School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124902
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	381003
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

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	112
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Davis
Headteacher	Audrey Finch
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2009
School address	South Close Bury St Edmunds IP33 3JZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 17 lessons, taught by 16 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior managers, members of the governing body, parents and carers, and pupils. In addition to observing the school at work, inspectors examined data about pupils' progress and looked at documents that analysed the school's performance and its plans for future developments. The views expressed by parents and carers in 52 questionnaires were also considered along with questionnaire responses from 17 members of staff.

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

- How effectively does the school promote pupils' early communication and numeracy skills?
- How effectively does the school promote pupils' independence and prepare them to cope with the everyday challenges they face?
- How effectively do teachers and other staff use assessment information to plan the next stages of pupils' learning?
- How well are older students prepared for the next stages of their education and for the world of work?

Information about the school

Riverwalk School caters mainly for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant proportion also have more complex needs such as autism, severe challenging behaviour, multi-sensory impairments and a range of complex health needs. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few speak English as additional language. Pupils are drawn from a wide area of Suffolk. Some pupils have the opportunity to attend local mainstream schools on a part-time basis. The percentage of pupils known to be entitled to a free school meal is broadly average.

The school has an Early Years Foundation Stage assessment unit, based on the site of a local primary school. This unit caters for twenty five children from Riverwalk. Most have a placement with their local providers and some of them are dual registered. All children attending this unit have a range of learning difficulties which are assessed before they are placed in provision to fully meet their needs. Very few of these children have a statement of special educational needs. Riverwalk pupils at Key Stage 1 are also located on the same primary school site.

The school has a number of awards, including the Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark and Activemark awards.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Riverwalk is a good school that has made significant improvements since the time of its last inspection, to the extent that almost all the outcomes for pupils and aspects of provision are better than at that time. Under the ambitious and thoughtful leadership of the headteacher, supported by senior members of staff and the governing body, these significant improvements have taken place in less than three years. The school analyses its performance rigorously and is always seeking to improve further. Detailed information is compiled about how well pupils are progressing. This data shows that pupils achieve well and make good progress. The overall rate of their progress over the last three years has improved at every stage. Based on this excellent track record, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. Pupils say they enjoy coming to Riverwalk and the majority of parents and carers are very happy with the quality of education. One parent commented, 'The school copes admirably with an incredibly wide range of disabilities and needs.' Another said, 'This is a great school. It is a vibrant, warm and welcoming place.'

The Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form are outstanding. This means children get off to an excellent start and when students leave, they are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages of their education and, relative to the challenges they face, for adult life. The school works very effectively to ensure that pupils acquire the basic skills of communication and numeracy to the best of their ability. Even so, there are times when opportunities to promote pupils' communication and thinking skills are not used fully. For example, teachers and teaching assistants do not always give pupils enough time to gather their thoughts and respond to questions. Opportunities to recognise and to celebrate their efforts and successes are greatly valued by pupils. However, teachers sometimes do not explain to pupils exactly what it is they have done well or what will help them to make further improvements. The school is also very successful in enabling pupils to attain as much independence as they can and providing them with the social skills that underpin their ability to work with others. These developments are based on good teaching and a curriculum that tailors activities precisely to pupils' needs and to the stage of development they have reached. The progress of every pupil is assessed accurately and the information gained from assessments is used to ensure that activities are matched precisely to pupils' learning needs.

The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are also outstanding. In this respect, teaching assistants make an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development. However, there are times when teachers do not prepare teaching

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assistants sufficiently well or use their skills fully to support pupils' learning during lessons. The partnerships the school has forged with other schools to enhance pupils' opportunities for learning and its work to ensure that all pupils are treated equally by eliminating all forms of discrimination are outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers make full use of the skills of teaching assistants and prepare them to contribute fully to pupils' progress in all lessons by:
 - briefing them fully about the planned activities
 - monitoring their work during the course of lessons and discussing its impact on pupils' learning.

- Extend pupils' communication skills and their knowledge of their progress by:
 - giving them more time to think and consider their answers to questions
 - re-visiting questions and providing help for pupils to extend their answers
 - being precise when explaining to pupils exactly what they have done well and what they need to do to make their work even better.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

The smiles on pupils' faces when they arrive at school and during lessons affirm their enjoyment of learning. Behaviour is good. Instances of challenging or unacceptable behaviour are often related to the severe learning difficulties that many pupils face. Such instances are often skilfully anticipated and defused sensitively by staff. Pupils are proud of their achievements and value the recognition they receive for trying their best and doing well. The school has detailed information on the good progress made by each pupil from what are invariably very low starting points. This good progress is affirmed by the lesson observations undertaken during the inspection and is particularly evident in the development of pupils' communication and social skills. The good progress is evident in the work of all groups of pupils, including those with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties, those with more complex needs such as autism, multi-sensory impairments and the full range of complex health needs.

Pupils say they feel very safe in school and appreciate the care they receive. Many pupils are becoming increasingly aware of how to stay safe when they are outside school. They are also knowledgeable about the importance of having a healthy diet and greatly enjoy the many opportunities for exercise provide by the school. Pupils also contribute well to the school and local community. They benefit greatly from residential visits, welcome visitors into school and are contributing to the design of the new outdoor play provision. Pupils are less well informed about the wider world, but gain much from events such as the school's Spanish language and culture day. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is enhanced by such activities as music therapy and dance and access to the sensory room.

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Pupils acquire basic skills well and this, coupled with their improving independence and social skills, is increasing their chances of a secure future. Attendance is broadly average: to reach this level, given the illnesses that many pupils experience, is a significant achievement.

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The good teaching and the use of assessment to plan the next stages of pupils’ learning have a significantly positive impact on their progress. The diverse range of severe needs and disabilities in each class means that activities have to be tailored very precisely to the needs of each pupil. Teachers do this very successfully. Activities are often practical, providing sensory experiences and contributing well to essential features of pupils’ physical development. Teachers invariably break learning up into ‘bite-sized chunks’ which helps pupils to sustain their concentration increasingly well. The development of pupils’ communication skills is central to all learning activities, although opportunities to extend these fully through precise questioning and prompting answers are sometimes missed. In the majority of lessons, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils’ learning and especially to their personal development. However, there are times when they are not sufficiently well briefed by teachers about the contribution to learning they are expected to make. Assessment plays a valuable, central role in pupils’ progress, both in their learning and in their personal development. Assessments are made

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 the expectations for the pupils’ age.

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accurately and frequently and the information gained is applied thoughtfully to the precise planning of the next stages of pupils’ learning.

The curriculum is good and makes a valuable contribution to pupils’ learning at all stages. There is a good balance between addressing pupils’ essential personal needs and the vital focus on their learning and progress. There is an effective focus on physical development, not only in the classroom but in the school grounds and pupils benefit from good opportunities to learn out of doors. Frequent off-site visits, including residential stays also contribute well to pupils’ learning and to their understanding of the world around them. The recently improved provision for specialist speech therapy and the appointment of a school nurse is already contributing well to pupils’ learning, as is access to the sensory and ‘soft play’ rooms. Wherever possible, opportunities are taken for pupils to learn at other special schools and in mainstream schools, sometimes on a part-time basis and, when appropriate full-time. Pupils benefit greatly from these experiences.

Care, guidance and support are excellent. Teachers and support staff are very knowledgeable about the background, development and needs of each pupil. Support staff and teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the personal and social development of each pupil. Liaison with support agencies and with families also plays an important part in pupils’ learning and development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The governing body and senior staff have established effective procedures to accurately evaluate the school’s performance and to plan for subsequent improvements. The positive developments that have taken place across all aspects of the school’s work in recent years are testament to the excellent way in which ambition is embedded and improvements are promoted. At the heart of these processes is the exceptional leadership provided by the headteacher.

The governing body are supportive and knowledgeable about the work of the school. They are playing an increasingly effective role in driving improvements, especially in bringing about developments to the school buildings. The governing body also fulfils the duties required of it by law. The promotion of equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination is outstanding. The school does a great deal of highly effective work to raise the profile of special needs in other schools and across the

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community. Partnerships to promote learning and well-being are highly effective. The Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 are based at a nearby primary school. The partnership with this school is outstanding in promoting exemplary special needs practice. Riverwalk School’s work in its expertise to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in other special and mainstream schools also provides an example of excellent practice. Engagement with parents and carers is also good. For their part, parents and carers are very supportive of the school’s work. Each year they make a significant contribution to raising funds. The recent highly successful community ‘fun run’ provides a telling example of this support.

The impact of the school’s effective procedures for safeguarding is evident in the high standard of care provided for the pupils and in the extent to which they feel safe. Community cohesion is also promoted effectively, especially within the local area, although pupils are relatively less well informed about beliefs and cultures that differ significantly to their own. The school uses its available resources wisely and, given the good outcomes for pupils, it provides good value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make exceptional progress, having invariably started with skills and knowledge that are low for their age. The Early Years Foundation Stage is based on the site of a nearby primary school. Children benefit greatly from opportunities to learn alongside their peers in the mainstream school. There is also an ideal balance between learning in the classroom and opportunities to learn out of doors. The outdoor provision on this site is used exceptionally well to promote children’s learning and especially their physical development.

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Teachers and leaders plan meticulously to ensure that activities are matched precisely to the learning needs of each child. They also ensure that each child can make as much progress as possible in every area of their learning. To this end, teachers and teaching assistants are well tuned-in to the needs of every child, with significant priority given to the promotion of early communication and numeracy skills and to children’s personal development. As a result, children settle in quickly. Given the challenges they face children acquire remarkable degrees of independence and sustain their interest in activities exceptionally well.

The assessment of children’s progress is accurate and frequent. The Early Years Foundation Stage acts as an assessment centre and, when appropriate, following assessment children join other special school schools or in some cases mainstream schools.

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

The school makes excellent provision for students to access a wide variety of options when they reach the sixth form. This provision includes students who leave at the end of Key Stage 4 to take up courses at a variety of colleges and other settings. Great care is taken to assess students’ progress and to fully consider their interests and aspirations. Every effort is made to locate a course that suits the students’ needs. To this end, links with the local college are strong and every effort is made to maintain support, even when students are not taught at Riverwalk. Those who decide to stay at Riverwalk thrive on an excellent range of activities that are matched precisely to their needs. Significant emphasis is placed on the continued development of essential personal and social skills. This happens very successfully because teaching is excellent and teaching assistants in the sixth form make a very positive contribution to students’ personal development and learning.

For those students who choose to stay at Riverwalk, every effort is made to provide activities that appeal to their interests. As a result, they retain their enthusiasm for learning. For example, during the inspection students visited the cinema. This visit generated some excellent written and photographic work which students were proud to share during discussions when considering the success of the trip. These discussions provided a telling example of the excellent progress students make in acquiring communication skills and the confidence they gain in their own abilities.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire is above average for special schools. The majority of parents and carers are pleased with the quality of education provided for their children. A significant minority of parents would like more information about how their child is progressing and about how they can help to support their learning. A few feel the school does not meet their child’s particular needs. However, many of these parents and carers explained this was because they feel the school’s buildings lack up-to-date facilities, such as a hydrotherapy pool. The majority of parents and carers are happy with the teaching their children receive. The headteacher and governing body acknowledge that some aspects of the accommodation are not as good as they should be. Improvements are gradually taking place as funding becomes available. These improvements currently include new toilet and changing facilities and significant developments to the provision for outdoor play.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Riverwalk 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 52 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	69	15	29	0	0	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	27	53	23	45	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	30	58	20	38	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	50	30	39	2	4	3	6
The teaching is good at this school	27	53	20	39	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	30	58	13	25	7	13	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	52	20	38	1	2	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)	21	40	20	38	4	8	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	25	50	16	31	4	8	3	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	46	19	37	3	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	52	20	40	4	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	56	20	38	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	30	58	17	33	1	2	2	4

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.



5 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Riverwalk School, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3JZ

I must start by thanking those of you who very kindly gave your time to tell me and my colleague about Riverwalk during the recent inspection. We think your school is good and were impressed by many things. We think the Nursery and Reception classes and the sixth form are excellent. We were very pleased to see how much you enjoy your learning, work hard, behave well and make good progress. This is because your teachers and the support staff all do a good job. They take excellent care of you and are vigilant at all times to make sure you are safe. You told us this is something you appreciate very much. We noted that you are rightly proud of your work and your school, and enjoy hearing about how well you are progressing.

In recent years, the hard work of your headteacher and her staff has done much to bring about improvements. You will not be surprised to learn they are always seaching for ways to make Riverwalk an even better school. With this in mind we have suggested they do the following.

- Make absolutely sure that teachers have explained to support staff everything they need to know about what you will be doing, so that they are always ready to give you as much help as you need.
- Give you a little more time to gather your thoughts before you answer questions, and make sure they always make clear to you how well you are progressing and how you can make your work even better.

We hope this will help your teachers to build on your already good learning. I would like to close by wishing you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Godfrey Bancroft
Lead inspector

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