

Riverside School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135232
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	381848
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Sonja Joseph

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	194
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Mays
Headteacher	Mr Steve Solomons
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 February 2009
School address	Main Road St Paul's Cray Orpington BR5 3HS
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 24 lessons taught by 21 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, and groups of pupils and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including development planning, self-evaluation records, policies, and performance data. Questionnaires from 53 parents and carers, 15 staff and 26 pupils were analysed.

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

- The effectiveness of management at all levels in ensuring good-quality provision for all pupils.
- The impact of the school's systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- The extent to which the curriculum provides a balance between meeting the wide range of pupils' needs and their entitlement to an appropriate mix of academic, vocational and work-related provision.

Information about the school

Riverside School is a special school for pupils with a very wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorders, emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities and medical needs. The school is located on two sites and has a designated resource for pupils with severe autism on the second site. The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage is above average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is significantly above average. Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes, including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher and the creation of a new senior leadership team. The school has gained a wide range of awards including Activemark, Healthy Schools Status and Sports Mark Gold Award.

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****2**

Main findings

Riverside is a good school. It has some outstanding features. Over recent years it has become a school where everyone is valued and where there is a continual drive to improve and to innovate to achieve the best for all of its pupils.

Over their time at Riverside, pupils make good progress in learning from starting points that are often significantly below age-related expectations. They get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Outstanding care, guidance and support mean that barriers to learning for pupils, even those with the most complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, are systematically tackled by knowledgeable, reflective and kind staff. The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to develop basic skills and is greatly enriched by a wide range of additional activities and specialist staff skills. Partnerships, both with parents and with external agencies, are excellent.

Pupils feel very safe and they have an excellent understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle. They behave well and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is clearly evident in the harmonious community where pupils with significantly different interests, abilities and needs learn and play together very well. Overall, their contribution to the school and local communities is outstanding. Whatever their age or starting point, pupils develop the skills needed for adult life well. They develop important skills such as cooperation, basic money skills and using public transport, as well as responsiveness to being cared for or caring for oneself. Their attendance is high. They learn to understand the benefits of doing a good job through the many work experience opportunities for all pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Sixth form pupils follow individual programmes for learning based on their capabilities and interests. The grades they gain over a range of nationally accredited courses confirm their good preparation for their next challenge.

Teaching is good overall. It is outstanding in some respects but the quality is inconsistent, particularly in the secondary department. In a minority of lessons, planning does not give enough attention to what pupils know and can do. Learning objectives and the links to success criteria are not always precise enough, or relevant to the learning needs and capabilities of individual pupils. In English and mathematics, targets are not always linked effectively to nationally expected levels of progress. This process for tracking achievement throughout the school does not allow staff to gain a clear overview of the rates of progress of individuals and groups of pupils in relation to national benchmarks.

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The school is very well led by the recently appointed headteacher who is totally committed to providing the best possible provision for its pupils. He has established a strong staff team, very resilient in their efforts to support each individual child, no matter what their individual needs may be. Strong leadership at each site ensures that there is a clear level of consistency in the quality of work through the school. The governing body provides a good balance of challenge and support, and plays a significant part in driving through improvements and shaping the school's future direction. The school's self-evaluation systems are largely accurate and include the views of pupils, staff and parents and carers. These factors, along with the school's detailed development plan, further support the view that the school has good capacity to sustain its improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the use of a range of assessment procedures so that the full extent of pupils' progress across all key stages is made more explicit in relation to nationally expected levels of progress.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is of a consistently high standard throughout the school, and especially in the secondary department, by:
 - using assessment information to plan lesson objectives, success criteria and activities so that all pupils are challenged to make rapid progress
 - improving the use of questioning and ongoing assessment in lessons so that activities can be amended or built upon
 - ensuring that day-to-day teaching makes best use of the interesting and exciting opportunities offered in the curriculum to motivate pupils through different learning styles
 - identifying and sharing the best practice in teaching across the school.

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

In a caring and secure environment, pupils gain a clear understanding of safe and unsafe situations. They flourish both as learners and as young people, as they develop and gain independence skills. This is the case for all pupils, including the minority of girls and those with the most complex needs, who have the greatest difficulty in relating their thoughts and feelings. Pupils' strong relationships with their teachers and teaching assistants help them become increasingly comfortable and confident as learners and, because of this, most lessons are enjoyable events. In these lessons pupils have fun as they learn, and this helps them to develop their communication and social skills and to establish genuine friendships with each other. For example, in an outstanding literacy lesson in the primary department, the highly effective use of multi-sensory experiences enabled all pupils to develop their feelings and responses to the stimulus of fireworks. Music, drama and the use of party poppers and video to create a magical firework atmosphere ensured all pupils made outstanding progress.

The attainment of each cohort of pupils varies widely depending on their needs.

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Although progress is good overall, and by the time they leave the vast majority reach typically expected levels given their starting points, progress is stronger in the primary department. This is because excellent practice, as seen in an outstanding mixed Years 10 and 11 English lesson, is not sufficiently consistent across the secondary department.

Pupils develop an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles, which is reflected in the Healthy Schools Award. They receive exceptionally good advice as to how they can contribute to their own health. Diets are very closely monitored. Pupils are quick to explain that the wide range of timetabled physical education activities, such as swimming and trampolining, and their out of school activities, help them to keep fit. This is reflected in the award of Active Mark and Sports Mark Gold Award.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their high attendance, enthusiasm for learning and positive attitudes. Behaviour is good in class and around the school, and some pupils behave exceptionally well. They develop good learning skills and many concentrate for long periods in lessons. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and the local community, for example, through the active school council, helping to design school play areas and devising playground activities. Older pupils have made a significant contribution through participation in local authority advocacy projects to present their views on access to and engagement with services for young people with communication needs. Effective arrangements for work-related learning and good progress in basic skills prepare pupils well for the future.

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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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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How effective is the provision?

In lessons, strong relationships between adults and pupils aid learning. Sensitive support from skilled adults helps pupils to achieve well. Pupils are engaged through different activities and effective strategies to promote good behaviour and communication. The use of signing and symbols enhances learning for particular groups. In the best lessons, the intended learning outcome is very clear and the progress towards achieving it is carefully monitored. Pupils' understanding is checked and then challenged to extend it further. The school has worked hard to establish accurate information and data on the attainment of each pupil. This information is not being used consistently well to inform planning of lessons and activities. The quality of questioning and assessment in a minority of lessons is variable. The school recognises that it has not yet ensured that the many exciting activities and specialist techniques that are on offer are embedded in everyday teaching so that it is consistently interesting, stimulating and matched to the learning styles of each pupil, as reflected in those lessons where outstanding practice was seen.

The curriculum is matched well to the wide range of personal and learning needs, and the school has adapted its accommodation very effectively to provide a number of specialist facilities. For instance, the addition of the Beckenham Autistic Spectrum Disorder Centre for primary aged pupils has enabled the school to provide support for those with autism spectrum disorders, and the centre is an integral part of the whole-school provision. The curriculum meets all requirements and focuses very strongly upon the promotion of communication, personal, health and social education and the sensory awareness of pupils. It provides an effective balance between academic, vocational and work-related opportunities for older pupils. A wide range of therapies, particularly speech and language and excellent extended services, enhances the provision and ensures that the range and complexity of pupils' needs are met. Enrichment activities, such as the sports clubs and visits to the theatre culminating in an actual performance of *Macbeth*, add to pupils' enjoyment of school and link their learning to real-life experiences. The school has some excellent outdoor facilities, including a horticulture garden and well-equipped hard and soft play areas. These areas are effectively used for both recreational purposes and learning activities and opportunities outside of the classroom. The best lessons incorporate exciting and motivating activities that make particularly good use of the school's resources; however, this excellent practice is not yet sufficiently widespread. There are good opportunities for pupils to spend some of their time in mainstream schools and for older pupils to attend further education placements.

The school works tirelessly to ensure that pupils are exceptionally well cared for, guided and supported at all times. As one parent commented, 'The school has gone above and beyond the basic requirements to support me and my child.' By making on-site provision for a number of multi-disciplinary teams, including occupational therapy and medical staff, the disruption to learners' education is minimised. Excellent care plans and very well-thought-out individual programmes ensure that specialist support for individuals nearly always comes to pupils in class rather than pupils being withdrawn to other settings. This means that pupils can stay involved in

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their lessons and not miss out on anything important. Staff share an extensive range of specialist skills, including gastrostomy feeding. They are also acutely aware of the many forms of seizure that pupils can experience and the need for urgency in dealing with them. Almost all parents attend the annual review of their children's progress and an increasing number are involved in supporting their children's learning at home. Provision for pupils as outlined in their statement of educational needs is fully met. Good arrangements ensure that transition for pupils through school is smooth.

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 new headteacher is committed to ensuring high-quality provision for all groups of pupils, while effective teamwork ensures that senior leaders' ambitions for the school are translated into systematic actions. Reorganisation has increased the way responsibilities are distributed among the staff, and this has contributed well to the school's capacity to improve. Lesson observation is frequent and rigorous, and inspection findings closely reflect senior leaders' existing knowledge of teaching. Thorough systems for supporting less experienced staff and very good use of training and research ensure staff meet the increasingly complex needs of its pupils. Staff leading provision for pupils with particular types of difficulty undertake specialist training to increase their expertise and provide valuable support to their colleagues. The school has good procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and acts swiftly to address any areas for development. It thoroughly identifies risks and ensures that staff receive up-to-date training to extend their awareness. The school works well to tackle discrimination and the successful promotion of equality is evident in the way in which all pupils work happily together.

Riverside School works increasingly well in partnership with other educational establishments; links with the educational business partnership and community organisations broaden the opportunities open to pupils and greatly facilitate transition planning when they leave school.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school knows the context of its community well and provides a wide range of activities to promote cohesion. Its evaluation of the impact of this work is, however, not yet fully developed. The governing body is highly active in promoting the school and its aims. Individual governors bring to the role an extensive range of relevant skills including financial management. Parent governors play an effective role in promoting communication and developing provision in line with the wishes of families. Engagement with

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parents and carers is excellent and is fully reflected in the parental questionnaires and active participation in whole school events and extended support services, as well as the establishment of a family and friends forum.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in their learning and social development. This is due to good relationships with adults, skilled teaching, and a thorough knowledge of the children. A well-planned curriculum ensures all areas of learning are covered. Effective assessment right from their first arrival means that each child's starting point is correctly identified and then progress is carefully monitored through learning journals and photographs. Children are engaged in sessions, cooperate well and enjoy learning. Signing is used well to support understanding and behaviour is managed calmly. Care and welfare arrangements are fully in place. There are very good relationships with parents, carers and other professionals. Leaders and managers have a clear idea of what to do next to improve the provision, for example to work with other providers to develop assessment further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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Sixth form

Very positive relationships between staff and students are a strength of the sixth form. Students feel very safe and supported. The curriculum is focused on the development of life skills, and this matches students' individual needs well. This means that students make good progress and the vast majority are very successful in moving to suitable placements when they leave. As in the rest of the school, the quality of teaching is good overall but sometimes inconsistent. In the best lessons, all pupils are fully engaged as active learners and make good progress. Occasionally, however, lack of opportunities for pupils to self-assess or share their experiences limits their progress. Leadership is good and improving, particularly in the use of data to precisely target interventions to accelerate progress further.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

In terms of the number of questionnaires returned, the response rate was lower than is normally the case compared to other inspections. Of those parents and carers who replied to the questionnaire, a large majority express satisfaction with the quality of education provided. Nearly all parents say their children enjoy school, that it keeps them safe and deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. A small minority of parents criticise the way the school takes their suggestions and concerns into account, prepares their children for the future and helps them to support their learning at home. A few do not think their children are making enough progress and being encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles. Inspectors explored all issues and found that the school's systems and procedures were effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Riverside 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 53 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 194 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	70	14	26	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	39	74	13	25	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	34	64	17	32	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	57	15	28	3	6	3	6
The teaching is good at this school	36	68	14	26	1	2	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	60	15	28	3	6	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	62	15	28	3	6	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)	28	53	14	26	4	8	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	66	15	28	0	0	3	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	53	16	30	1	2	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	66	11	21	4	8	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	37	70	12	23	3	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	70	12	23	2	4	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.



4 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Riverside School, Bromley, BR5 3HS

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and particularly appreciate the helpfulness of those pupils who spoke to us, shared their work and explained what they were doing during lessons. Your school is providing you with a good education. This means that there are some things that your school does well and some things it needs to improve.

We found that your school has some important strengths. Your behaviour is good and you enjoy coming to school. It is good to know that you are very happy with the way adults look after you and that you feel so safe in school. You have an excellent knowledge of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and enjoy having lots of responsibilities, such as membership of the school council. You work hard in lessons and all the adults who work with you are determined to make sure your school keeps getting better.

To make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher and teachers to make sure that all of your lessons are as good as the very best. You can help by continuing to try your best.

It was a privilege to meet you all.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Joseph
Lead inspector

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