

Rowhill School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	119045
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379713
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2012
Lead inspector	Timothy Feast

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Britton
Headteacher	Steve McGuinness
Date of previous school inspection	25 March 2009
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Age group	7–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Timothy Feast

Additional inspector

Elizabeth Drake

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons taught by 12 members of staff. They held meetings with members of the governing body, groups of pupils and staff. The inspectors took account of the responses from the online Parent View in planning the inspection. The team observed the school's work, and looked at school documentation, including development planning, assessment information indicating pupils' progress, attendance data, the governing body minutes and monitoring records of teaching and learning. The inspection team analysed 15 parents' and carers' questionnaires, as well as 87 from pupils and 22 from staff.

Information about the school

Rowhill School is much larger than similar special schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils have been assessed as having behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, but an increasing number are being admitted with difficulties on the autistic disorder spectrum. There are many more boys than girls and many more pupils of secondary age than primary. The proportion of pupils who arrive or leave the school at times other than the traditional transition dates is much higher than the national average.

Since the last inspection, the school has moved premises. The new school site is a mixture of extensive new accommodation and the adaptation of existing facilities of a different school. The school's designation has changed since the last inspection and it is now designated as a school for pupils with behaviour and learning difficulties.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Rowhill School is a satisfactory school. It is not yet a good school because pupils' rates of progress are not better than the progress of pupils with similar starting points nationally and teaching is not consistently good. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. Attainment has improved for pupils by the time they leave in Year 11, although it is still below the national average. Progress is inconsistent, being better in subjects such as art, physical education and vocational courses than in the core subjects of English and mathematics.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Although attendance is below the national average, a majority of pupils improve their attendance while at Rowhill. The majority of pupils improve their attitudes to education while at the school. In lessons where opportunities are offered, they work well collaboratively and with enthusiasm. The majority of pupils feel safe at school and this is confirmed in the parents' and carers' responses to the questionnaire.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory. The school's focus on ensuring work is matched closely to pupils' needs has improved since the last inspection but is not yet consistent in all lessons. Additional support in lessons is not deployed consistently well. Teachers plan learning activities but these do not always challenge pupils sufficiently. The school policy for teaching reading is not yet adopted consistently.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders, including the governing body, have successfully implemented the move to the new site. The tracking of pupils' progress has been developing well but this management information is not yet used consistently well to monitor the quality of provision or to embed the school's best practice in all classes and thereby improve teaching.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of pupils in lessons and over time by ensuring that:
 - staff implement a consistent approach to the teaching of reading
 - teachers plan consistently more challenging activities, using the good assessment information provided for them
 - teachers deploy additional adults more effectively so that pupils' needs for making better progress are a major focus.
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- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - school leaders focus more on pupils' progress when observing lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching
 - the school's best practice is shared with all staff and that school leaders make sure all staff are incorporating this practice routinely into their lessons.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils enter the school with skills generally below those normally expected for their age. A majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are happy with the progress their children are making and about three quarters of the pupils responded in their questionnaires that they learn a lot in lessons. Inspection evidence, as seen in lessons and in pupils' work, indicates pupils make satisfactory progress in all the key stages represented in the school. By the time they leave school, pupils are narrowing the gap with national performance, and progress is better in subjects such as art, where GCSE results are at or above the national average. Pupils said they enjoy subjects such as Hair and Beauty, physical education and food technology. The school's tracking information and results in accredited courses in these subjects reflect the positive progress pupils make.

In core subjects such as English and mathematics, pupils make satisfactory progress, with progress in reading and mathematics better than in writing. Although a minority of pupils, both primary and secondary, do not reach the levels expected for their ages in reading, overall attainment is broadly average and pupils' progress is satisfactory. The use of specific reading sessions is having a positive impact on achievement. Primary-age pupils heard reading were using appropriate phonic skills to decode new words, had a good grasp of blends and initial and final sounds and, on occasions, were able to self-correct. Secondary-age pupils use their improved reading skills in a variety of contexts, for example when interrogating the meaning of poems in a Year 8 English lesson. Overall, different groups generally make similar progress, although in 2011, Year 11 girls made better progress than the boys.

Pupils' learning in lessons was better when the activities challenged them, gave them opportunities to assess one another's work and where additional adults were deployed specifically to accelerate pupils' learning. Pupils in a Year 8 science class quickly demonstrated their understanding of DNA and the double helix through making a model of a gene. Pupils in a Year 11 music group showed resilience and a

great deal of enjoyment in their performance of a range of songs, the quality of the performance illustrating why the group takes part in shows for external audiences. In other lessons, the tasks set for pupils were not sufficiently challenging and adults were not effectively deployed to enable the pupils to demonstrate their increased learning or their skills in working either independently or collaboratively, for example in a mixed-age primary class working at doubling and halving numbers. Progress in lessons observed was similar for the different groups of pupils, including pupils on the autistic disorder spectrum.

Quality of teaching

All the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire and about three quarters of the pupils in their responses were positive about the quality of teaching and the support the staff give. Pupils usually listen to the staff and carry out the instructions given. The quality of teaching is satisfactory but varies considerably in lessons. Nearly a third of the teaching seen was good or better, for example in a Year 8 French class pupils were taught well how to speak about taking part in a number of Olympic sports, and in a Year 11 English lesson, pupils progressed well in redrafting their letter to an Olympic athlete. Such lessons contribute positively to pupils' social and cultural development. In the other two thirds of lessons, teaching was satisfactory, usually reflecting the slower pace of learning and the limited challenge set for pupils.

A number of pupils commented in their discussions with inspectors that work was often too easy and some commented that when this was the case, the quality of their behaviour declined. Teachers manage behaviour well and pupils are appreciative of the support and guidance they receive from staff to improve their behaviour. Many classes, especially in the primary section, contain pupils of different ages and of very different levels of ability. However, planning does not always reflect sharply the differing needs of the pupils. Teachers' planning often indicates the needs are to be met by additional support from other adults. The best support provides the right blend of help and guidance so pupils made good progress but on other occasions the support has insufficient impact. While the school has identified its approach to teaching reading, teachers do not regularly identify key words that are to be used in lessons or consistently reinforce the correct spelling of words using the phonetic guidance that pupils have been given.

Pupils' work is marked regularly. Pupils commented on the variability in the quality of guidance they are given. There is insufficient checking by teachers of pupils' progress during lessons and then modifying the task to improve the pupils' rate of progress. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and the work of others. When given the opportunity, pupils do this well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is typically satisfactory. The majority of pupils improve their behaviour and attendance while they are at the school. Pupils re-engage with education to the extent that nearly all pupils go on to further education when they leave the school in Year 11. Some Year 6 pupils who make good progress in their learning are re-integrated into mainstream schooling in Year 7.

In lessons, the large majority of pupils are attentive. Low-level disruption is managed well by staff. In the best lessons, staff provide challenging and meaningful ways in which pupils can learn and pupils respond positively to such opportunities. Pupils in discussion with inspectors indicated positive attitudes to their art work, and this is evident in the quality of work on display around the school and in the art room. The pupils are very positive about the activities provided by the Challenger Troop, an organisation offering uniformed youth engagement programmes, and both Year 6 and Year 8 pupils during the inspection were looking forward to their time with Troop leaders.

The pupils in their responses in the questionnaires and in discussions with inspectors raised concerns about how effectively the school deals with bullying. Pupils indicated that bullying was mainly name-calling. Scrutiny of the school's behaviour and bullying log indicated the school dealing appropriately with the incidents recorded. Parents and carers who responded indicated that they are happy with how the school deals with bullying and also with the general standard of behaviour. Pupils indicated clearly that they knew the steps they need to take to keep out of harm, including the safe use of computers.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders, including governors, have worked effectively to embed the school's vision in the new facilities since the last inspection. School leaders have taken good steps to improve the school's tracking records of pupil achievement. However, this information is not yet used consistently well to plan lessons or used by school leaders to monitor and determine the quality of provision. School leaders have responded to the need to improve reading standards and are beginning to see the impact of their strategy but it is not yet consistent in all lessons.

There have been recent appointments to the leadership team. Evidence from the inspection and from the school's monitoring shows increased capacity to improve aspects of the school's work including assessment and the quality of teaching and learning. While staff are generally confident in the school's provision for their professional development, a minority think leaders do not do enough to improve teaching. Leaders have focused on improving teaching, and through professional development and performance management, have had a satisfactory impact. School leaders have increased the opportunities for pupils to take accredited courses and are aware that this needs to be continued in conjunction with improved attainment in core subjects such as English and mathematics. The curriculum provides for enrichment through activities that pupils value, for example sporting opportunities and through visits to places like the Science Museum and Wembley stadium. The curriculum meets the needs of the pupils and promotes well their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including promoting pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain and further afield.

The governing body has been very supportive of the school and contributed significantly to the planning for the new facilities and the financing of the project. It has not done enough to hold school leaders to account, especially in raising pupils'

achievement. The valuing of all pupils is at the heart of the school's ethos, and equality of opportunity is promoted positively and discrimination is not tolerated. Some parents and carers in their responses to the questionnaire asked for improved communication with the school and there are insufficient effective strategies for engaging with parents and carers, for example through the school's website. School leaders, including the governing body, ensure that statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



20 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rowhill School, Longfield, DA2 7BW

Thank you for the welcome you gave to the inspection team on our recent visit to your school. We particularly enjoyed talking with groups of you about your work and what you think about the school. Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. These are some of the strengths.

- The curriculum meets your needs and you tell us you enjoy many of the courses such as art, music, physical education and Hair and Beauty.
- You make satisfactory progress in your learning overall and older pupils are taking a bigger range of courses which are accredited.
- Your behaviour and attendance often improve while you are at the school.
- We agree with you that the best teaching challenges you and gets you to learn actively, while working with a partner or in small groups.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and members of the governing body to do the following to make your school even better:

- make sure all the teaching in the school is at least good
- improve the ways in which you are taught reading
- ask more teachers to plan more challenging activities for you
- ask the other adults in lessons to help you make more progress in improving your learning.

All of you can help by continuing to improve your attendance and behaviour and working hard.

Once again, thank you for the welcome you gave us and for the interesting discussions we had with you.

Yours sincerely

Timothy Feast
Lead inspector

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