

Ripplevale School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	886/6047
Unique Reference Number (URN)	118995
URN for social care	SC023668
Inspection number	397756
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2012
Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi
Social care inspector	Sophie Wood

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and the government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

Ripplevale School is a residential special school which opened in 1970 and, since the acquisition of a former village school building, is now located on two sites in the village of Ripple, close to Deal in Kent. It is owned by the Directors of the Ripplevale School Company. It is registered for up to 60 boys, aged from seven to 16 years and it is planning to open a sixth form. There are currently 43 boys on roll, of whom seven are weekly boarders. All pupils are referred by their local authorities. At present, five pupils are looked after children. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs related to either social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum conditions. Some pupils have a combination of these special needs and others have additional learning needs related to literacy.

Without exception, Ripplevale pupils have experienced a fragmented education as a result of their special educational needs. For the majority, their attainment on entry to the school is well below average.

The school had its last combined education and social care inspection in November 2009 and its last full social care inspection in March 2012.

The school's stated aims are 'to provide a caring, learning environment where our boys can make meaningful progress, relative to their individual starting points. Our aim is to encourage them to develop appropriate personal, social and employable skills enabling them to become confident, independent and aspiring young people'.

Evaluation of the school

Ripplevale School provides a good quality of education and meets its aims fully. The combination of a good curriculum, exceptionally good pastoral care, robust

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

⁴ www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

safeguarding arrangements and outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, enables pupils to flourish in a safe and secure environment and to make outstanding progress in their personal development. Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in their high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, their outstanding behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils make good progress in their academic learning owing to good teaching and the unstinting dedication of both education and care staff teams. The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. The school has made good improvements since the last combined education and social care inspection and now meets all of the regulations of independent schools and all of the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Quality of education

The good curriculum is broad and balanced and serves the needs of all pupils well. Its main strengths are that it promotes pupils' outstanding personal development and helps them to develop good basic and life skills. It encompasses all the statutory and non-statutory subjects of the National Curriculum and pupils learn French from Key Stage 2 onwards. In the lower school, the curriculum is centred on pupils' interests and needs and taught from a thematic approach, and so it re-engages pupils in education promptly. A recently implemented whole-school strategy to foster pupils' love of reading is already having a positive impact on pupils' reading skills throughout the school. However, one lost opportunity is the lack of formal development of pupils' literacy skills across all subjects and this is why the curriculum is good rather than outstanding.

From Key Stage 3 onwards, clear progression routes enable pupils to maximise their potential. Pupils typically gain confidence by working towards Entry Level certificates before moving on to GCSE courses and some benefit from early entry in their GCSE examinations. There are plans in hand to further widen the programme of life and key skills and the range of accredited courses to serve the needs of pupils even better.

Personal, health, social, and citizenship education (PHSCE) permeates the whole curriculum and, allied to the ethics curriculum and the excellent enrichment programme, it makes a very strong contribution to developing pupils' empathy, emotional awareness, social skills, self-knowledge, as well as leadership, financial and other life skills. Pupils learn the value of team work when they enter sports competitions against other schools. A good range of lunchtime clubs is available to both boarders and day pupils and helps pupils to extend their social, creative, analytical, technological and musical skills. Pupils have numerous opportunities to contribute to school life and the wider community and develop the qualities needed to become responsible citizens.

The provision for pupils' special educational needs is good and it has improved significantly since the last inspection owing to increased staff expertise and better-structured support programmes. Following a six-week initial assessment of their needs, pupils are supported well through identification of their preferred learning

styles as well as their specific educational needs, clearly written individual educational plans, the setting of weekly learning targets and personalised educational and therapeutic support programmes. The staff now benefit from ongoing training in autism, as well as in other conditions such as developmental dyspraxia.

The planning of the curriculum supports the teaching effectively and ensures that pupils progress well in their learning. In the lower school, appropriate recording of the curriculum areas covered by pupils in mixed-age classes ensures continuity in their learning. The curriculum is monitored closely by the senior leaders and it is integrated very well by the care and education staff to support the boarders' 24-hour curriculum. Pupils are helped to make informed decisions about their future through satisfactory careers education. Currently, work experience is not structured in a way that makes it easily accessible for all pupils.

Teaching and assessment are good and the proportion of outstanding teaching has increased since the last inspection owing to well-targeted training and very effective monitoring of teaching and learning. Staff are very positive about their professional development. Good teaching is underpinned by good subject knowledge and close team work between teachers and learning support assistants, some of whom are care staff. All staff establish excellent working relationships based on mutual respect. They know their pupils extremely well and show a thorough understanding of their needs, aptitudes and attainment. They have developed their expertise in using teaching strategies that best work for the majority of pupils who are autistic spectrum learners. They judge wisely when to intervene to support individual pupils and when to encourage independence. They use open-ended questions very effectively to deepen pupils' understanding and a variety of methods and resources to match pupils' individual learning styles closely. Where the teaching is outstanding, the teacher is often driven by passion and communicates enthusiasm for the subject, checks frequently on pupils' learning and responds promptly to extend pupils' learning. As a result, the fast pace of learning never slackens and pupils make outstanding progress.

Good assessment procedures enable the school to assess pupils' learning rigorously and to track their progress effectively. All the available assessment information is shared among care and education staff to meet the full range of pupils' needs. Pupils are helped to form a clear picture of how to improve through the setting of weekly targets and constructive verbal and written comments. Parents and carers are informed of their children's progress and successes through regular telephone contact and positive postcards sent home, as well as through reporting and consultations with staff. Detailed reports inform the annual review of pupils' statements of special educational needs.

As a result of the good curriculum and good teaching, pupils make good progress over time in their academic learning. Some pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics and science. By the end of Year 11, most pupils achieve at least six accredited awards including GCSEs. Most move on to college and others find employment.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Throughout the school and the residential provision, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Boarders and day pupils are unanimous in saying that the school makes them feel safe and secure and that staff care for them exceptionally well. They feel understood and accepted and recognise that the school and residential provision place their emotional well-being at the very centre of the school's culture and ethos. Consequently, they can re-engage with their education promptly and gradually develop high levels of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. Their regular attendance and high level of participation in lessons and in clubs demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They speak eloquently of their self-transformation since joining the school and of their aspirations. 'This is a school that has helped us to improve our experiences of life, our social skills and our learning, and it has changed our lives for the best.'

Pupils have numerous opportunities for reflection and for developing emotional literacy throughout their school day and residential life. For example, when discussing the last scene of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Year 10 pupils showed that they could empathize with George and imagine the range of emotions he felt just before he shot his friend. Emotional literacy and the excellent role models provided by staff help pupils to form positive relationships with others and to develop socially acceptable patterns of behaviour. Meals are social occasions when pupils engage in sustained conversation with others and even some banter. Pupils are considerate, courteous and helpful. They have a keen sense of right and wrong. They show patience and tolerance when someone finds it difficult to behave well and work undisturbed. Their behaviour is outstanding and those who have emotional and behavioural difficulties have made enormous progress in managing their anger or frustrations.

Pupils develop a strong sense of social responsibility and leadership skills through the work of the active pupil council and participation in Eco-school projects. They contribute to school life by producing a school magazine and newsletters, initiating clubs and suggesting improvements. In the lower school, pupils participate in Christmas productions. Pupils are keen to provide services for local residents and to raise funds for charity. They learn about public institutions through PSHCE, opportunities to experience active citizenship and educational visits. Through the ethics curriculum, they learn to respect others' views and gain a good awareness of diversity which is extended practically by visits from various faith leaders. Their cultural development, fostered through several areas of the curriculum, is enhanced well by the enrichment programme.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is underpinned by exceptionally good pastoral care, attention to detail and extensive training that exceeds requirements and supports staff extremely well. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. All the required checks are carried out on adults working at the school. All staff are trained in child protection to appropriate standards at shorter intervals

than required. The designated person for child protection liaises with all relevant agencies swiftly and transparently. Low-level concerns are diligently monitored. This pro-active approach prevents situations from worsening. All the essential policies and procedures aimed at minimising risks are up to date and implemented consistently. Parents, carers and pupils have full confidence in the staff's ability to counter bullying and promote the highest standards of behaviour. Pupils respond very well to the reward system and the celebration of their achievements. Illnesses and accidents are very rare among boarders. Boarders are encouraged to take appropriate responsibility for their own health needs. High staffing ratios ensure that supervision is vigilant throughout the school and the residential provision. Through PSHCE and visits from public services officers, pupils learn to keep safe and to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils commend the catering provision, and the nutritious meals and healthy snack policy help them to adopt healthy eating habits. Day pupils and boarders have numerous opportunities to exercise vigorously.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Robust recruitment procedures and meticulous filing ensure that all the required checks are carried out on all staff prior to confirming their employment. These checks are recorded in a single central register that is a good practice model.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises provide teaching and residential accommodation that enables safe, effective and pleasant learning and living. A maintenance programme ensures that the accommodation is maintained to an excellent standard. Displays of pupils' work decorate the walls. Boarders value their environment and look after it. Single occupancy bedrooms provide excellent privacy and pupils delight in personalising their own rooms. The school makes effective use of local facilities for swimming.

Provision of information

Parents, carers and placing authorities receive all the required information, which is accurate and up to date. Parents and carers are very positive about the school's work and feel well informed of their children's progress. The local authorities that expressed their views were very complimentary about the school. Financial information is sent, as required, to all pupils' placing authorities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedures meet all requirements.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding and secures outstanding outcomes for boarders. Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. The national minimum standards are exceeded in many areas, including the provision for boarders' health, well-being and safety. For example, the school regularly reviews the impact of restricting pupils' access to specific areas and

manages the risks posed to individual pupils wisely. A collaborative approach to care planning ensures all relevant parties are appropriately involved. Care and education staff work very closely together to ensure boarders experience consistency of care. Parents, carers and relatives are highly valued for their contribution. Comments include, 'I know exactly what is going on,' and, 'We work together, it's better at home now.' 'They understand and accept him, he didn't get this before.' Boarders receive individually tailored care and support from a stable, competent care team which is equipped with excellent resources. On-going training, clear procedural guidance and very effective supervision results in the delivery of high-quality care which enriches the lives of boarders.

The residential provision is extremely well managed. Lines of responsibility and accountability are clear. Robust monitoring and quality assurance processes drive the senior leadership team to critically analyse the school's own strengths and weaknesses as these emerge. The school acknowledges the need to further develop the care team's appraisal and supervision systems to ensure effective professional development. Staff are passionate about continued improvement.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated regulations.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Structure the work experience programme in a way that makes it more easily accessible for all pupils.
- Help pupils to make even better progress in English by developing literacy across all subjects.
- Further develop the care team's appraisal and supervision systems to ensure effective professional development.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	Inadequate
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Overall effectiveness of the residential experience

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	✓			
Outcomes for residential pupils	✓			
Quality of residential provision and care	✓			
Residential pupils' safety	✓			
Leadership and management of the residential provision	✓			

School details

School status	Independent
Type of school	Special day and residential school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and/or autistic spectrum conditions
Date school opened	1970
Age range of pupils	7–16 years
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	43
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	0
Number of boarders	7
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	43
Number of pupils who are looked after	5
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,131
Annual fees (boarders)	£63,591
Address of school	Chapel Lane Ripple Deal Kent CT14 8JG
Telephone number	01304 373866
Email address	info@ripplevaleschool.org.uk
Principal	Ted Schofield (Principal)
Proprietor	Ripplevale School Company (Chris Danican and Clifford Davies)

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 November 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Ripplevale School, Ripple, Deal, CT14 8JG

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team so warmly when we visited your school recently. We greatly enjoyed meeting you, seeing you learn and talking to you about school life. You told us how much the school has done for you and that it transforms your lives. You explained that you feel very safe and secure and that the learning is good. We were delighted to observe your social skills, your self-confidence and your high level of response in class. We were impressed by your outstanding behaviour and your sense of responsibility. You are proud of your school and we understand why. We found that your school provides you with a good education, excellent care and that it meets all government requirements. Staff work very hard together to help you develop all the skills you need to prepare you for your future.

You learn a wide range of subjects, can join many different clubs and take part in lots of educational visits. You make good progress in your learning and excellent progress in your personal development. Your teachers and learning support assistants care for you very well and teach you well. You feel safe and understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and taking exercise.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked the school to:

- structure the work experience programme in a way that makes it more easily accessible for all pupils
- help pupils to make even better progress in English by developing literacy across all subjects
- further develop the care team's appraisal and supervision systems to ensure effective professional development.

You will play your part in making your school better if you continue to work hard and maintain the highest standards of behaviour.

Yours sincerely

Michèle Messaoudi
Lead inspector