

RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning

Wheelwright Lane, Coventry, CV7 9RA

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding`	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The school has continued to improve and there is a commitment to excellence. Staff possess a detailed knowledge of every student and this supports them in achieving the best possible outcomes.
- Detailed tracking of progress helps students to do extremely well.
- The sixth form is outstanding. It continues to offer high quality teaching while supporting students' moves towards becoming more independent.
- Teachers and classroom assistants make extremely strong teams. Their high expectations help students do their very best. This includes in their personal and social progress as well as in their progress in learning.
- The very effective promotion of communication and mobility skills often reflects the good teamwork that exists between teachers and therapists.
- Behaviour and safety are a high priority, as many students can find it difficult to behave well. Individual behaviour plans support the well-being of a group of students who are potentially very vulnerable.
- The leadership team has been extended since the last inspection and shows vision and ambition for staff and students.
- Leaders support staff in making an outstanding contribution to the lives of their students. This includes opportunities for staff to further their professional studies.
- The expertise found in the school is now starting to be used to support other schools in helping to meet the needs of their pupils and students.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a total of eight lessons, taught by four teachers and a higher-level teaching assistant.
- He met with students and looked at the work they were producing.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff at the school and representatives of the governing body. Telephone calls were made to the Chair of the Governing Body and to the Group Director (Independent Living) of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).
- There were not enough responses to the on-line Parent View web-site for an analysis of parents' views, but a meeting was held with a group of parents and the school's own parental questionnaire returns were examined. The views of staff were gathered from discussions and from their staff questionnaire returns.
- A range of documents were scrutinised including evidence of students' progress, planning for teaching and learning, the schools self-evaluation and development planning, and key policies and procedures, including those for keeping students safe.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a non-maintained special school for students with severe visual impairment coupled with additional multiple learning disabilities, including physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders.
- All have a statement of special educational needs and are placed at the school with the agreement and funding of their local authority.
- There is also an RNIB registered children's home on the site, which has a separate management structure from the school, where all but five of the students live. This was inspected separately and the report can be found on the Ofsted website.
- Both the school and the children's home moved into new purpose-built facilities during 2011 following the RNIB's investment of nearly £30 million in the site. At that point the name of the school was changed from its previous name of Rushton School and Children's Home.
- Although the school is registered to take pupils and students from the age of four all current students are of secondary school age, which includes a sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-above average, although the status of the school means that these students do not directly attract the additional government funding known as the pupil premium.
- The numbers who are from minority ethnic communities other than White British is well above average, with the proportion from families who speak English as an additional language above average. However, throughout the whole school few students use verbal communication.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its students.
- The deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2012.
- The school is currently in the process of becoming an academy sponsor with the intention of using its expertise to support and promote the quality of wider special educational provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Expand the school's provision of outreach services in order to share its expertise in the education of students with visual impairments and associated learning difficulties to other schools on a regional and national basis.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Since the last inspection the school has developed and refined ways in which it measures the achievement of its students. This shows that while attainment will always be exceptionally low the progress and achievement of students from their starting points is usually outstanding unless medical issues limit individual progress.
- Staff have been trained in target setting and all students are challenged to make the best possible progress. There is a focus on measuring progress in basic literacy and mathematics. However, care is also taken to make the most of personal and social development. Over the last three years increasing proportions of students are reaching or exceeding their targets even though these are individually challenging.
- There is a particular focus on developing communication skills. Technology is used very effectively, opening up new and exciting ways for students to communicate with others. For example, hand-held computer devices are increasingly being used, including voice recognition for verbal students. The use of switches enables students to make a variety of choices and decisions that promote learning and speed up progress in various ways.
- Few students communicate verbally and the number able to speak in whole sentences is even smaller. Reading in the traditional sense is often not possible. However, technology can be used when appropriate such as 'electronic voices' by which students can communicate. In many cases, however, the levels of disability are so profound that communication skills remain limited.
- Students often work one-to-one with a member of the classroom teams who are skilled at recording progress. At the end of each lesson this is fed back to the rest of the group in a celebration of achievement. Teachers carefully note progress in students' individual folders during every lesson, gaining a detailed understanding of individual progress.
- Progress of individuals is collated at the end of each term to give a whole-school picture of raised achievement since the last inspection, when it was found to be good. Teachers are individually held to account and in termly discussions with the leadership team student progress and targets are reviewed to make sure that all are fully challenged. In the sixth form this includes promoting skills for future life after school.
- Performance information shows that there is no difference in the outcomes of any groups; all are able to make exceptional progress from their starting points. This includes comparisons of boys and girls, and an analysis of the progress of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, or from homes where English is an additional language, for example.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The achievement of students is so positive because of the outstanding impact of the teams that support learning in every class. Teaching is at least good and much is outstanding while the roles of other adults, such as teaching assistants and therapists, are crucial in supporting every student to fulfil their physical and learning potential.
- In every class this teamwork is outstanding and reflects not only the empathy of adults towards the students with whom they work but also their professional expertise. Teachers are expected to gain the specialist qualification in the teaching of visually impaired students, some having

taken this on to Master's degree level, and teaching assistants all complete the specialist course developed within the RNIB.

- Every lesson is marked by detailed planning which includes tasks tailored to the individual students and outcomes that take account of current achievement. Much of the time in lessons is spent working one-to-one with an adult and every member of staff in this situation has high expectations, supporting students to do their very best. The constant focus on learning produces positive outcomes and boosts individual progress.
- Students enjoy their learning and this is reinforced by a review of personal achievement that ends every lesson. Students are encouraged to be proud of their work and celebration often marks these discussions. Staff are committed to every student and this is reflected the strong promotion of equal opportunities throughout the school whatever the background or level of need of the individual.
- Sometimes specialist teaching gives an added dimension to lessons. For example a class that had been studying the gods of Ancient Greece was able to use the specialist music facilities to play percussion instruments to interpret elements of a story they had heard in class, which students enjoyed tremendously.
- Teachers develop excellent relationships with the parents and carers of students they teach. They are encouraged to come into lessons when they are visiting for example, a positive element for those who are visiting a young person who lives at the children's home on the site.
- The school's developing outreach, known as the Periscope Service, is increasingly using its very specialist expertise to support teachers and students in other schools, both special and mainstream. It is an area that the school is rightly looking to expand.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- When they first join the school a majority of students display extremely challenging behaviour, including harming themselves or others. However, carefully devised and implemented individual behaviour plans successfully identify ways in which, over time and with outstanding support, such challenges can be moderated or overcome. Parents and carers are often particularly grateful for this because it enhances the safety of their young people.
- This is reinforced by the close relationships that each student develops with an identified member of staff who gets to know what triggers negative behaviours. All staff are trained in strategies for calming down potential incidents and this, coupled with their individual knowledge and very careful monitoring of individuals over time, leads to the school being a place where all students are able to learn.
- All staff are trained annually in techniques for restraint. While any such incidents are fully logged there is a strong emphasis on positive alternatives to this approach.
- Individual risk assessments are in place for all students and for all activities they carry out, both on-site and during trips. Health and safety receives a high priority under the care of a specific member of staff. Similarly arrangements for safeguarding a group who are potentially very vulnerable are of a very high standard.
- Bullying in the traditional sense is not an issue since so few students communicate verbally.

However, care is taken to make sure that students get on well together and support each other, including safe use of the internet. The promotion of positive social skills is just one important element in the successful promotion of wide-ranging spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- School leaders are committed to the school developing as a regional and national centre of expertise because of its success in providing education for the very small number of students who have these complex and severe learning difficulties.
- Already a range of local authority visual-impairment services, charities and organisations in the visual-impairment field, and schools with visually impaired students and other complex disabilities have sought advice from the school.
- In their own practice leaders set very high standards and communicate high expectations, to which staff respond very positively. The outstanding teaching has improved since the last inspection because of enhanced support from checks on classes and teachers' planning, both of which are undertaken on a regular formal and informal basis.
- Even though this is a non-maintained school teachers are employed under the national terms and conditions of teachers, including arrangements for the setting of annual performance targets. Other staff's appraisal is undertaken in line with the RNIB's procedures which are equally rigorous. It is understood that when teachers move onto the higher pay scale there are higher expectations of their performance and responsibilities.
- The school's view of itself is thorough and effective. This allows it to draw up plans for improvement based on identified priorities. It also supports training and professional development, which is based on meeting the needs of the school as well as the personal development of staff members.
- Relationships with other professionals who support the students and with their parents are exceptional. Parents show tremendous support for and confidence in the school.
- Themes and topics are taught in highly individual ways to meet the particular needs of all students. They also provide many positive opportunities for enrichment through a range of clubs, visits and activities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Ultimately the governance of the school is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees, who approved the bid for the school to become an academy sponsor so that it could use its expertise to support other schools through the academy programme. Since the last inspection the governing body's education sub-committee has developed its role and expertise. It is effective in challenging the school. It follows students' progress much more carefully and understands the effectiveness of staff in delivering the curriculum. Trustees also have a clear picture of the use of financial resources, although the school does not directly receive additional funding for specified students unlike local authority schools. Trustees support the school in keeping students safe and reinforcing the commitment to equal opportunities and opposition to discrimination of all kinds.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122155
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	402083

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
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	21
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The Board of Trustees
Chair	Neil Harris
Headteacher	Andrew Moran
Date of previous school inspection	01 December 2009
Telephone number	024 7636 9500
Fax number	024 7636 9501
Email address	pearscentre@rnib.org.uk

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