

River House School

Stratford Road, Henley-in-Arden, B95 6AD

Inspection dates 21–22 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The rate of students' progress in mathematics and science is not yet good because teachers set work that does not challenge them enough.
- In some lessons in other subjects, work is not set at the right level for all the students and is too easy for some and too hard for others. As a result, not all students make the progress expected of them.
- Procedures for managing the performance of staff have not been checked closely enough. There has not been enough training for staff to lead to improvements in teaching.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have not been rigorous enough in monitoring the school and bringing about improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement in reading is good because students have regular opportunities in every year group to read good quality books.
- Teaching in the off-site vocational education provision for students in Years 10 and 11 is often inspirational, enabling students to produce some high quality work.
- Behaviour is good because it is well managed and older students in particular are polite, helpful and have high aspirations for the future. Students say they feel safe in school.
- Attendance has improved over the past three years.
- Exciting outdoor education programmes play a valuable role in engaging students in learning and promoting strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders make effective use of pupil premium funding to ensure that students eligible for this help achieve as well as their classmates.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons, many jointly with the senior leaders both at the main school site and in two offsite vocational education establishments for older students in Key Stage 4. In addition, the inspectors made a few shorter visits to observe students' learning, and listened to some students read.
- Inspectors spoke to staff and students on each site and had lunch with students.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, a local authority representative and several groups of students.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about students' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and students' books and files.
- There were too few responses to the online survey (Parent View) to use them to form a judgement about parents' views but the lead inspector spoke to a number of parents on the telephone. The inspection team also took account of the 12 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Heald

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for students from across Warwickshire who are supported by a statement of special educational needs for their behavioural, emotional and social needs. A few students are from surrounding authorities.
- About a third of students have additional learning difficulties including moderate learning difficulties, speech and language and/or communication difficulties. A very few have autistic spectrum disorders.
- There are 20 students in Years 10 and 11 who are taught in a variety of offsite provisions around Warwickshire. These include, 'Warwick Space,' 'Hybrid Arts', CHESS Centre and the Nuneaton Opportunity Centre. For a variety of reasons these students are hard to place. Some of these students have previously attended residential special schools or other special educational needs settings such as pupil referral units. Some are from mainstream schools where they were at risk of permanent exclusion. These off-site provisions offer functional skills and vocational qualifications that prepare students for life after school. These students have a reduced curriculum and a shorter day than their rest of the students in the main school.
- The school provides outreach support to primary schools who have referred students for support from Years 5 or 6 and who have a statement of educational needs for their behavioural, social and emotional needs or who are at risk of exclusion. These students are referred through the local authority.
- Almost all students are White British.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The school provides breakfast for all students on arrival in the mornings.
- The headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher, from his normal role as deputy headteacher, two months ago due to the long-term absence of the permanent headteacher. The current deputy headteacher is also acting, appointed from his assistant headteacher post.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to speed up progress across the school, particularly in mathematics and science, by:
 - providing training for all staff in planning to meet students' individual needs and abilities
 - ensuring that tasks engage students so that they are inspired and challenged by the work set
 - Making sure that teachers have high enough expectations of each student so that tasks are sufficiently demanding and enough work is completed in each lesson.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on students' progress by:
 - increasing the rigour with which leaders and managers monitor the school's work
 - providing training for governors so that they understand how well the school is performing
 - Improving systems for managing the performance of staff and making sure they have opportunities to develop their skills through training and, thus, make a greater contribution to the school's effectiveness.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students do not make good enough progress, particularly in mathematics and science, from their starting points. Their progress in numeracy and problem solving is too slow because too little is expected of them in lessons and tasks do not always match their individual abilities.
- In Years 10 and 11, a lack of individual tasks matched to each student's abilities resulted in students becoming frustrated as they tried to calculate the length of different sides of a triangle. Their understanding was too limited for all students to succeed with the task.
- Progress in science dips when tasks are not matched to the next steps in students' learning. In Year 7, for example, when students were learning about growth, they were not challenged well enough and for some students, tasks were too easy and did not provide any challenge. As a result, they did not all do enough work or make the progress expected of them.
- Reading skills are developing well and there are many opportunities for students to read aloud and to adults. Year 7 students were eager to read to an inspector and showed confidence and enjoyment in their reading. School data shows that most students make good progress from their individual starting points in reading.
- Students' communication skills are fostered well through regular encouragement to talk aloud in class and during assemblies. This provides them with the confidence to communicate their ideas, respond to questions and talk to adults.
- Students with additional learning needs such as those with moderate learning difficulties, speech and language and/or communication difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders, receive good quality individual and small-group support. As a result, these students make at least similar progress to their classmates. Those who fall behind are given additional help, enabling any gaps in attainment between groups to narrow.
- The high proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding reach similar standards to other students in the school. They make good progress in English and make the progress expected of them in mathematics because additional staff supports them in lessons and extra resources, including information and communication technology, are provided for them.
- Students' books show that most students use writing appropriately in subjects other than English, for example, in history. Extended pieces of writing about the life of Mary Tudor showed good understanding of the different views of this monarch's achievements.
- Most students acquire some accreditation by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 11. They attain GCSE and or Entry Level qualifications in a range of subjects but too few attain higher levels in subjects such as English, mathematics and science in relation to their abilities.
- Students' achievement in physical activities is of a high standard. For example, the school table tennis team is currently top of its local schools league. Students swim regularly and take part in a wide range of challenging physical activities. A recent trip to France, for example, saw students canoeing, abseiling, climbing, caving and trekking. Students really value these opportunities and engage in fundraising to ensure they can take part.
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- Students in the off-site vocational education provision are well prepared for the future because of the work experience opportunities and skills that they learn at the different centres. Students say that the staff in these centres focus on success, and provision meets their needs better than at school because it is matched closely to their future aspirations. Some students are working towards becoming car mechanics or developing art and design expertise from professional artists in preparation for college.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Progress in lessons slows when teachers do not set work at the right level to meet each student's needs and abilities. It also slows when students are not challenged by the work set or interested in the tasks.
- Slow progress was seen where tasks were perceived as 'babyish' by students, such as a cutting and sticking exercise in science where a few students refused to cut and stick pictures so that teaching assistants did it for them. Students showed that they were bored by the work set. As a result, their behaviour deteriorated and they did not complete enough work in the time allowed.
- Progress also dips when teachers do not plan well enough for the more-able students. They then finish quickly but lack more challenging tasks to extend their skills further. This was particularly evident in mathematics lessons where planned tasks did not fully meet the abilities of each student enabling them all to fulfil their potential.
- Teaching varies too much in quality. Good teaching in subjects such as English, history and vocational education was evident in students' work, in their positive engagement in lessons as well as in the pace of their learning. In these subjects, tasks excite and engage them and good quality questions extend students' thinking skills so that they search for answers and maintain interest, achieving well.
- Inspirational teaching at 'Warwick Space' and at 'Hybrid Arts' results in students learning new skills and making much better than expected progress in their personal development and in their preparation for life after school.
- The quality of teaching of reading has improved across the school. Clearly structured and well-planned sessions provide opportunities for all students to read regularly and help them to improve their skills so that they enjoy reading. Staff question students well about their reading, requiring them to search their texts for answers.
- Assessment is improving. A good new tracking system has been introduced and this is just beginning to show students' progress over time. There are examples of good marking in English helping students to improve their work and encouraging them to respond. However, this is less evident in other subjects. Homework for older students is set but is less evident in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching assistants are used well to support groups of students and to enable those with additional special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding to take part fully in lessons. Resources are used well to engage students in learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well in and around the school. Their attitudes are positive and there is little evidence of learning being disrupted despite all students having a statement of special educational needs for their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- Students on all sites say they feel safe at the school. They understand about the different kinds of bullying they may encounter but they say there is no real bullying at school. Older students say they know about cyber-bullying and are unaware of any involving students at the school. They say staff would quickly sort it out and there is always someone around to do this. The majority of staff agrees that students' behaviour is good.
- Just occasionally, a few students do not listen in class as well as they might. They sometimes become restless when tasks are not matched to their needs or abilities or are not appropriate to their needs.
- In discussion with the inspector, several groups of students said that they enjoy school. They value the activities that enable them to take part in exciting topics and trips to a wide variety of places. They talked sensibly about how they had raised funds for the trip to France and the challenges they had faced. Regular visits such as this help to broaden students' awareness of the wider world and provide opportunities to raise their aspirations for the future.
- Attendance across the school is improving and most students now attend regularly.
- Students' personal development is promoted well. They are given opportunities to help around the school, such as putting chairs out for assembly and clearing away and they raise funds for different charities. Students at 'Warwick Space', one of the off-site provisions, told the inspectors that they really like attending because it meets their needs and prepares them very well for the future.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. A broad range of curriculum topics, trips and work experience supports students' learning well and means that they gain confidence and have a good awareness of the wider world.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The senior leaders, together with subject leaders, recognise that there are some weaknesses in the quality of teaching and that this affects students' learning. They are working closely with the local authority to improve the rates of students' progress in all subjects. They have a clear and accurate view of what needs to be done to improve and have already begun to make changes.
- The headteacher, along with the local authority, has reviewed the quality of teaching and learning, arranged visits for teachers to other schools and provided some additional training to promote school improvement. All of this is beginning to have an impact on the quality of provision and, though there is more to do, an appropriate start has been made.
- Leaders have begun to make use of The National Teachers' Standards to bring about improvements. There are a few examples of staff progressing up the pay scales because of training and support, which has helped them to improve their effectiveness and seek promotion. However, teachers have not received enough support in the past and there has not been enough training for all teachers to ensure that teaching improves.

- The extended curriculum has been effectively improved by leaders at all levels, including subject leaders, and now has a positive impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. On a recent trip to France one student commented, 'It's been the best time of my life.' Students now have a good awareness of life outside Warwickshire and the wide range of additional experiences provide enrichment to students' lives that they highly value. Vocational opportunities prepare older students well for life after school and the vast majority of school leavers have found employment, education or training in the past three years.
- Leaders use additional funding well to make a difference to students lives. Pupil premium funding and Year 7 Catch-up funding are used appropriately to fund additional staff and resources to support students' learning and help them to catch up.
- Parents who spoke to the inspector by telephone said that staff at the school are very supportive and provide good quality help to them and their children.
- Leaders successfully promote equality and eliminate discrimination through their very effective policies and procedures which make sure that all students have equal opportunities to access all the experiences on offer.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. The school carries out careful risk assessments of the off-site provision to ensure that students are safe.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are committed to their roles but have not challenged the school well enough in the past few years. They have recently undergone a review from the local authority to improve their effectiveness and now visit the school more regularly to check how well students are doing. They link closely with individual subjects, observe teaching and check progress. Until recently, governors had not checked students' achievements effectively enough to identify areas for improvement. They are now working quickly to catch-up and bring about improvements. Governors are aware that teaching requires some improvement and that there has been a lack of emphasis on managing the performance of staff. They manage the finances allocated to the school appropriately and ensure that funding allocated for students who are eligible for premium funding is successfully spent on raising achievement for those students.

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	125795
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	427062

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John West
Headteacher	Simon Constantinou
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2011
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