

Rowhill School

Main Road, Longfield, DA3 7PW

Inspection dates 30 April – 1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Although effective leadership and management have produced significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and attendance in a short time, leaders have not yet been wholly successful in raising standards in reading and writing to good.
- Not enough teaching is typically good.
- Staff's management of pupils in lessons in the primary department is not always effective in reducing low-level disruption.
- Teachers do not routinely use the good assessment information that they have to set work that encourages pupils to learn effectively.
- Not all staff plan to develop and extend pupils' reading and writing skills through all subjects.
- Pupils have limited understanding of their learning targets or of precisely what they need to do next to improve the quality of their work.
- Too few pupils make the progress that should be expected of them in reading and writing given their age and levels of ability.
- Not all available time in the school day is used to best effect to promote pupils' learning and accelerate their rate of progress.
- The school measures pupils' progress well, but it is only now beginning to compare pupils' achievement with the national picture.

The school has the following strengths:

- Good leadership and management have raised expectations of pupils' personal development to good effect, and academic standards are improving.
- The senior leadership team has a good grasp of what needs to be done to improve the quality of education further.
- Standards in mathematics are improving significantly.
- Attendance has improved greatly since the last inspection and it is now in line with the average for special schools.
- The school is generally calm and orderly and pupils' behaviour is usually good.
- Safeguarding procedures are secure and pupils confirm that they feel safe in school.
- The reading support programme for selected pupils is beginning to make a notable contribution to improving their reading fluency and understanding.
- The school has good links with partner schools and colleges and with other agencies.
- Staff show strong support for the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in all key stages being taught. Eleven lessons and one reading support group session were visited, each taught by a different teacher, and all of them were observed jointly with a member of the school's leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, an officer from the local authority and two groups of pupils.
- Parents' and carers' opinions of the school could not be gathered through the online questionnaire, Parent View, as too few responded for the results to be displayed.
- The views of staff were collected from the questionnaires that 42 completed.
- A wide variety of documentation was examined, such as pupil assessment data, attendance records, safeguarding procedures, self-evaluation and development planning.

Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Carol Vant

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rowhill is a larger than average special school, in which the vast majority of pupils are boys.
- Approximately two thirds of pupils are of secondary school age.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs that is primarily for their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. However, a significant number of pupils also have additional needs associated with, for instance, their autism or speech and language difficulties.
- Many pupils receive support from other agencies, such as social services, the youth offending service, and child and adolescent mental health services. More than a tenth of pupils are children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Three of the four senior leaders, including the headteacher, have been appointed to their post since the previous inspection. The Chair of the Governing Body is also new to the role.
- The school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and children from families in the armed services) for almost three quarters of pupils, which is well above the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage, and no pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils receive part of their education in other settings, such as Hadlow College, Challenger Troop and the Archway Project.
- The school is the base for one of the local authority's specialist teaching and learning services, which is a partnership between educational services and other agencies that work with children with special educational needs, their families and schools. It is managed by the headteacher of a different special school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that more is good by ensuring that staff routinely:
 - promote pupils' reading and writing skills in all subjects
 - use their knowledge of all pupils' prior learning and current understanding when planning learning activities and producing resources.
- Raise standards so that a greater proportion of pupils make good progress and achieve well by ensuring that:
 - pupils have much clearer information about how they can improve their work, including understanding their targets
 - class timetables are constructed in ways that make the best use of all available time in order for pupils to develop new skills, knowledge and understanding
 - assessment data are used more effectively to set pupils' targets and to monitor their progress and achievement compared with pupils of the same age and similar ability in schools elsewhere.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in the year following the previous inspection was inadequate in reading, writing and numeracy. Around a fifth of school leavers in 2013 did not move into education, employment or training.
- The situation is now improving, especially in mathematics, but standards in reading and writing are not yet at a level to indicate good achievement compared with the national picture for pupils of the same age and starting levels.
- A few pupils achieve extremely well in reading and writing and exceed national expectations, and an increasing proportion are making the progress expected of them. However, there remains a small group of pupils who are not achieving over time as well as they should because of inadequate teaching in the past.
- Pupils make much better progress in mathematics and so the proportions making expected or better progress compare much more favourably with the national picture.
- The progress made by pupils who receive targeted funding, such as those who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who benefit from the Year 7 catch-up programme, is broadly the same as that made by their classmates. There is no significant variation in the proportions that make expected or better progress in English and mathematics.
- Overall, the progress made by pupils with significant additional needs, such as autism, and those who are looked after by the local authority matches that made by others. Boys and girls make similar progress.
- Pupils enter the school at different ages and many of them arrive after significant periods of turbulence in their life, such as prolonged periods of absence from school. The school does a good job in stabilising the situation and helping pupils to re-engage with education. In these circumstances, many of these pupils make good progress in reawakening their enjoyment of learning but not to an extent that is evident in formal assessment data.
- Pupils whose performance suggests that they might benefit from additional support for reading and writing make good progress in the extra sessions that they attend. In addition, more effective systems across the school for teaching the early stages of recognising letters and being able to make their sounds (phonics) is also beginning to have an influence. However, the support programme has only been introduced recently and the phonics programme is not yet fully secure and so there has not been time for the full impact of either to be seen in raised standards.
- The school plans to meet the particular learning needs of the most able pupils through the way in which the secondary classes are grouped.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement, even though some classroom practice is very effective and promotes good learning. Because the quality of teaching varies, pupils do not routinely make good progress in lessons.
- Teachers generally have a good understanding of the subjects that they teach, and on the whole their relationships with pupils are good.
- Staff typically monitor pupils' learning and check their understanding well, for example through skilful questioning.
- There is a high number of skilled teaching assistants, and teaching is most effective when class teams are well briefed and managed. On these occasions, teaching assistants play an important role in supporting pupils' progress. Even when teaching requires improvement, many teaching assistants show initiative in helping pupils to learn.
- Staff work in line with the school's behaviour management procedure but they do not always apply it sufficiently robustly. Consequently, low-level disturbances caused by a very small

number of the younger pupils are not dealt with quickly enough and transitions from one activity to another are not always smooth. Pupils' learning stalls as a result.

- Teaching is most effective when staff use the detailed information that they have about pupils' attainment to plan activities and to provide resources that challenge each of them to build on what they have learned previously. In some lessons however, the work is too challenging or too easy.
- Some staff extend pupils' communication skills through different subjects, which makes an important contribution to the development of their reading competence and writing fluency. This is not typical however, and sometimes opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to read and write in different situations.
- Staff mark and assess pupils' work regularly and in some cases they share this information with the pupils very well. In these circumstances, pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do next in order to improve, both in lessons and over the longer term. However, as this is not routine practice, many pupils cannot talk in any detail about precisely how they can get better in different subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The success of senior leaders' focus on improving pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance is clearly evident. Pupils' attitudes to learning and to school generally are now good, and pupils generally turn up for lessons on time and appropriately dressed.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly, and behaviour in areas such as the playground and dining room is good. The grounds are litter free, there is no graffiti and wall displays are respected.
- Pupils new to the school quickly learn what behaviour is required of them because there is an expectation that they will be courteous and respectful, which is reinforced by the posters around the school that provide a constant reminder of the school's code of conduct.
- There have been no permanent exclusions in the recent past, and only one short fixed-term exclusion. Records show a steeply declining trend in the number of recorded incidents and in the number of occasions when staff have had to use a physical intervention to manage particularly difficult behaviour. The vast majority of staff take the view that pupils' behaviour is good.
- Pupils' more positive attitudes are evident in the steep rise in attendance over the past year. Attendance was a particular problem a year ago, especially the high number of pupils who were persistent absentees. The rate of attendance is now broadly average despite many pupils having to miss school for appointments with the many other agencies that work with the school.
- Senior leaders monitor the pupils' behaviour and the nature of incidents closely, and so they are able to respond quickly to any trends or patterns that emerge.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff are unanimous in their view that pupils are safe. Pupils are taught about the potential risks associated with internet use.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because of some silliness among some of the primary pupils at times.
- While there have been a small number of racist incidents and cases of bullying, these are limited to verbal comments rather than physical intimidation and are dealt with effectively. Pupils and staff take the view that bullying is not a problem.

The leadership and management are good

- The local authority confirms that the school was vulnerable in the period following the previous inspection; attendance was very low, pupils' behaviour was a concern and standards were low. Furthermore, in the first term the senior leadership team was a person short and two of the three that were in post, including the headteacher, were new to that role.

- Since the senior leadership team got back to full strength and established, the headteacher has led it well on a journey that is improving the school. Future planned improvements are accurate and relevant and senior leaders and the governing body have the capacity to see them through.
- Leaders' priority was to improve pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance in order that they could lay down the foundations for teaching and learning to develop. This has been successful.
- Leaders have also had an impact on raising the quality of teaching. The school's monitoring shows that some teachers' practice has improved significantly and that all staff's teaching is good on occasion. However, despite intensive training and coaching, teaching is not yet consistently good, although leaders know where they need to intensify their efforts.
- Teachers' targets for improving their work are rigorous and the objectives set link very closely with the school's priorities that are determined from checks on its effectiveness. Consequently, there is a shared vision of what the school is trying to achieve.
- The local authority continues to work very closely with school leaders and it has also strengthened the influence of the governing body following a review of governance.
- The effectiveness of how targeted funding is spent is reviewed regularly. The impact of pupil premium payments and Year 7 catch-up money that were spent on raising standards in literacy, especially reading, is now becoming apparent.
- Primary school physical education and sports funding has encouraged pupils' greater participation in physical activities through expenditure in areas such as new equipment, participation in inter-school competitions and after-school sports clubs. Transport arrangements make it difficult for pupils to attend after-school sporting activities and so some of this funding is used to subsidise later transport so that pupils can participate.
- Pupils study a range of subjects that is suitable to their age and interests. Key Stage 4 pupils have a work-related element to their learning and they follow a range of accredited courses. Therefore, there is breadth to pupils' learning but there is an imbalance between the time spent on activities, such as 'reward time' and off-site placements, with that devoted to learning key skills.
- The school works very effectively with partners. Links with support agencies contribute much to pupils' social, moral and emotional development, and partnerships with other education providers enable older pupils to pursue a range of work-related courses.
- Leaders collect a great deal of information about pupils' performance and they use this very well to identify pupils who are underperforming. However, their analysis and presentation of the information to staff and governors are not outstanding because they do not routinely show how pupils' achievement compares with pupils of the same age and similar ability in schools elsewhere, and pupils' targets are not consistently set based on this information.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors use the local authority's training programme well to acquire sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
 - The governing body has good awareness of its role in challenging and holding school leaders to account. Regular visits into school give governors the information to be able to do this.
 - The governing body monitors pupils' behaviour and performance through very regular headteacher reports. Governors' scrutiny of such information is evident from the fact that they have requested that aspects of data presentation be clarified.
 - The governing body knows how targeted funds are spent and the effect that this is having on raising standards. Governors also have good information about how well different teachers perform. This gives them good understanding of the outcomes of teachers' appraisal and of how teachers' pay is linked to their performance.
 - The governing body works closely with leaders to ensure that all safeguarding measures are in place and monitored for their effectiveness.

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	119045
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	428953

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carl Sizmur
Headteacher	Tim South
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 June 2012
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