

Rowan Park School

Sterrix Lane, Litherland, Bootle, L21 0DB

Inspection dates 10–11 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- It maintains its outstanding status because leaders and managers work highly effectively to make sure that teaching is outstanding and continues to improve to match the changing needs of students, especially the rapidly growing numbers of those with autism.
- Tasks are very precisely matched to students' ability and to their most pressing needs. Many of these are personal and social but staff remain highly aware that this is a school and that students come here to learn. From starting points that are always very low, all students make outstanding progress and all leave with qualifications.
- This outstanding progress is the result of highly skilled teams of staff in each classroom knowing exactly what signs of progress they are looking for. These teams are expertly led and managed by teachers.
- The sixth form provision is outstanding. Excellent progress is made in helping students to become more independent and to help them to understand what lies ahead when they leave.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Staff are quick to notice the tiny changes that they recognise as signs that all is not well with a student. In this way they are particularly adept at preventing incidents. Nearly all instances of misbehaviour are closely linked to students' assessed needs, particularly autism.
- Students feel very safe and secure in school. Even those with minimal speech were often able to say to the inspector 'happy'.
- Parents are almost unanimous in their praise for the school and what it is doing to help them as well as their children.
- Leadership, management and governance are exceptional. Recent moves to share responsibilities more evenly amongst senior staff have been hugely successful and there is now an excellent group of middle managers.
- All teachers are set annual targets for improvement and these have clearly helped to raise standards. Occasionally, some of these targets are not worded precisely enough to avoid any possible contention when it comes to checking whether or not they have been met.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classrooms except one and saw parts of 15 lessons, each taught by a different teacher.
- A meeting was held with 15 members of the school council and inspectors communicated informally with many other individuals during and in-between lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- The views of 18 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted’s on-line questionnaire, were taken into account, as were the views of parents who asked to speak to inspectors during the inspection.
- The results of the school’s own surveys of parent, pupil and staff views were taken note of.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a consultant who has recently worked in the school.
- Wherever possible, samples of pupils’ work were checked. For the younger or least able, teachers’ records of their progress were carefully scrutinised.
- The environment in which pupils learn and play was explored and evaluated.
- The way that staff and governors make sure that pupils are kept safe and free from bullying or harassment was given particular attention.
- Systems for keeping check on the effectiveness of staff performance were reviewed.

Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Paul Edmondson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Most students have severe, profound, multiple and complex learning difficulties. A few have life limiting or deteriorating conditions. Each has a statement of special educational needs.
- There is a trend for more and more students to be admitted with an increasing complexity of need. Almost a half of pupils have additional difficulties relating to autism. Many students need personal care in all situations. Nearly all students are White British. Boys considerably outnumber girls, as is usually the case in schools such as this.
- A much higher than average proportion of students is known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after children). There are currently nine looked after children.
- A long serving headteacher has left since the last inspection. Her replacement has been in post for about three years.
- Some sixth form students attend Thornton College for up to one and a half days each week. Most of the courses they follow there are aimed at easing students' transfer into mainstream colleges at a later date. The college is a new form of provision for disabled students up to the age of 25.
- The school has achieved the Rights Respecting Schools Award. This is an award that recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of everything the school does.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that the targets that teachers are set for improvement are worded precisely enough to remove any possibility of contention when progress towards meeting them is reviewed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Outstanding achievement has been maintained for seven years and over the course of three inspections.
- Starting points are always very low. Children joining at the age of three often perform at a level that is more typical of a newly born child. Other students join at a later stage but nearly always at a level below that recognised by the National Curriculum. Whatever their starting points, nearly all students make hugely significant progress in their learning and development. Achievement can vary between developing a growing ability to respond to a stimulus or learning how to talk or travel independently.
- However frail the youngest children may appear to be it is wonderful to see that their parents are asked to send in wellies, hats and scarves to supplement the waterproof clothing that the school provides in recognition that whatever the weather children are going to spend a lot of time outside feeling the wind on their faces and the warmth, cold and wetness of the English climate. All the time in a purposeful, well planned range of adult led or child centred activities.
- The most important progress pupils make is in learning how to communicate. Staff strongly promote and develop any form of communication any student appears capable of. For some it might be through a gesture or pressing a switch to respond yes or no to a question or to convey need or discomfort. The most able students are always encouraged to use speech as much as possible. The importance of the progress being made in communication is the growing ability of students to express choice and gain increasing control of their lives.
- Literacy and numeracy are strongly promoted. Few but the oldest and the most able can read or write but many show a love of books and stories that are read to them and get excited when they recognise familiar characters in illustrated stories. Many students are learning how to count and do simple sums. Others get better at sorting objects or putting them in order. Students show great pride in their achievements and persevere very well in circumstances that must at times be very difficult for them.
- One of the reasons why students with autism make such good progress is that teachers have an excellent understanding of the way they learn and the type of environment they learn best in. Some students find it very difficult sharing space, taking turns or sitting round a table for parts of lessons but teachers never give up on trying to promote these skills and recognise when students are making progress in acquiring them.
- Because each individual's need is so clearly identified, and work and support so carefully planned, there is no difference in the performance of different groups. These include boys and girls, students of different ages, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after children.
- Teachers make sure that every student leaving Key Stage 4 does so with some form of accreditation or qualification. These often reflect learning at a pre National Curriculum level. On transfer to the sixth form the focus tends to move towards the imminent need for students to become more independent and able to make sensible choices that will affect their adult lives. They are given excellent opportunities to sample different jobs and to join in with courses at the new college to prepare them for the future. Leaders and managers know exactly what happens to each leaver for many years after they leave. None become lost to education, employment or training. Many successfully transfer to mainstream colleges of further education.
- When leaders and managers asked students what they liked most and least about the school the biggest 'dislike' was physical education. The school has acted promptly on this by introducing much more fun and variety into sport and physical education at a level that firstly encourages greater participation then builds on this, for instance, through the introduction of cycling and trampolining, which students say they like. Much of this has been supported by good use of additional sports funding for primary age pupils.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The highest standards of teaching have been maintained now for many years. Teaching is especially well adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of the types of pupils being admitted.
- Teaching does not peak for inspection. Seven years of monitoring by leaders, managers, visitors from other schools, the local authority and consultants keeps coming to the same conclusion that it is consistently strong. This is clearly reflected in the consistently high level of achievement of students.
- Many teachers are particularly skilled and highly qualified in the teaching of students with autism. They are highly adept at providing each student with a learning environment that is precisely matched to the way they learn best.
- There is tremendous strength in the teaching of students with the most profound disabilities. The most important feature of this teaching is that it recognises that students may learn very slowly but that is no excuse to teach them slowly. Students are given frequent changes of activity and regularly moved to different locations or positions. There is no chance of boredom here and a strong sense of vibrancy and celebration.
- Teachers are exceptionally good at providing students with opportunities appropriate to their age. Children in the Reception class are treated just as any child their age would be, students in the sixth form are treated as young adults. Sometimes the level at which they are assessed is exactly the same. The way they are treated and taught is very sensitive and different.
- A huge strength of teaching is the fact that in every lesson every member of staff in a classroom knows what is expected of every student. This means that they are all aware of what signs of progress they are being asked to look for and at the end of a lesson can say whether what has been expected has been achieved.
- There are frequently as many adults as there are students in any classroom, sometimes more. Teachers lead and manage these large classroom teams exceptionally well.
- Teachers recognise typical behaviours and are well prepared for untypical ones because they draw up hugely detailed plans to let all support staff know how to recognise the onset of possible problems, how to try to prevent them and how to deal with them if prevention does not work.
- Teachers do everything they can to make learning interesting and fun. They know when to stimulate students and when they need a rest from it. Resources are used well. These vary from beans, to equipment costing thousands of pounds. All that teachers are concerned about is whether the use of them helps pupils to learn and develop.
- All staff are highly skilled in promoting communication by whatever means possible. The range is enormous. Signs, symbols, picture references, objects of reference, pictures and the use of technological aids all feature strongly in teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- Visitors very quickly come to the conclusion that this is a good place to be. Students are delightful. They are welcoming and polite and are clearly proud of their school. Parents share their children's views that this is a happy and safe school where everyone is nice to each other and where they make friends.
- Any misbehaviour is nearly always associated with students' difficulties and usually related to the typical behaviours of students with autism. It is always well managed to make sure that other students do not become anxious or have their learning disrupted.
- Older students show considerable maturity in the way that they take great pride in supporting those who are younger or less able than themselves. All pupils take great pride in their

achievements and are keen to impress adults and each other.

- Students attend whenever they can. Several have frequent or elongated periods of absence for health reasons. A few have very complicated family lives. The most recent figures for attendance show improvement on last year. This is a school that does not exclude students.
- A huge contribution to students' behaviour is the skill of staff in managing it and their clear understanding of the exceptionally high quality individual behaviour plans.
- Students are keen to let visitors know that they are happy and that everyone in their school is nice to each other. There is no name calling or mockery. Some parents point out that in other schools their children have been made fun of but that here they never are. No students express concern about being bullied or feeling frightened.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students nearly all say they feel safe and well looked after and their parents' agree. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements at the time of the inspection met all requirements to a very high level. All possibility of risk in activities is carefully assessed and matched to the added risk that certain individuals can pose to themselves, others or different situations.
- Students are given exceptionally good advice about how to keep themselves safe and healthy. This includes a lot of honest advice about the dangers of using computers and telephones carelessly and what to do if they are on their own and things do not go as planned, such as transport not turning up or a friend not being there.
- Great attention is paid to promoting the emotional and medical safety of students. Many staff are highly trained to support feeding programmes and the administration of routine or emergency medication.
- Staff are very well trained in the physical handling of students, be it lifting, comforting or restraining them.
- A great strength of all this care and protection of students is the fact that staff go to enormous lengths to make them aware of peril without making them fearful of it.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- This is a school that keeps on changing but never stops improving. Since being judged outstanding seven years ago leaders and managers have had the drive and vision to make the school even better. Changes in staffing, from the headteacher to the appointment of newly qualified teachers have all been exceptionally well managed as the school moves on to ever greater effectiveness and acclaim.
- Central to the success of the school is the way leaders and managers lead an endless quest to improve teaching. Teachers are given excellent opportunities to develop new skills to help them to understand the needs of the changing population of students and to make the best possible provision for addressing those needs. Leaders and managers encourage challenging training at a level that supports staff to become leaders in their field and sufficiently authoritative to be in demand to support other schools.
- A new tier of middle managers has been created this year. They take responsibility for different key stages. Each of them produces detailed improvement plans and is developing good skills in monitoring performance of teachers and the progress of pupils within their age group. Middle managers are increasingly involved in observing lessons and contributing well to constant improvements in teaching.
- Parents are almost unanimous in their praise for the school and the way it is helping their children. They highly value the excellent attention the school pays to promoting their children's spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Students are equally complimentary and nearly all staff are proud to work in the school.
- The local authority has long recognised the excellence of the school and the fact that it probably has more to offer than receive but whenever help or advice has been sought it has been quickly provided.

- The timetable is highly personalised. Leaders and managers are good at letting teachers identify what students need and then within reason getting on with providing for these needs. The result is that students' most pressing needs are being exceptionally well met. Because of this attention to individual needs there is no discernible difference between the progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and all other students. Where the money is best spent is in subsidising transport to enable all to participate equally in after school activities and in making sure that all students can participate equally in school trips including residential activities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are immensely proud to be associated with this school. Many bring specific skills and perspectives to support its improvement and direction. Parents are well represented, there are good links with the community and governors are becoming increasingly prominent around the school. They are kept well informed about the quality of teaching and learning and when they ask questions about why things are as they are, they expect straightforward answers. Governors regularly ask questions about how the headteacher describes the effectiveness of the school and what is being done to build upon strengths and get rid of weaknesses. They carefully keep a check upon how extra money coming into their budget, for instance, through primary sports funding or the pupil premium is being spent and to what effect. They are keenly aware of that fact that if teachers want to be paid more they have to demonstrate that they are worth it. This includes the headteacher, in whom they have the upmost confidence which is thoroughly deserved. Governors ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements, including those that relate to keeping students safe and secure.

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	104983
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	439643

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Val Healy
Headteacher	Karen Lynskey
Date of previous school inspection	11 May 2011
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