

Rotherham Aspire

New Street, Rawmarsh, South Yorkshire, S62 5AF

Inspection dates 16–17 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Rotherham Aspire has gone from strength to strength since the time of reorganisation, due to the strong and determined leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Senior and middle leaders, together with the management committee, have a clear sense of purpose and staff share their vision for excellence.
- Strong links with outside agencies and a broad and rich curriculum help to promote effectively pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The quality of art work in primary and secondary classes is outstanding.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils respond well to the chance of a fresh start. They learn to behave well in lessons and are developing positive attitudes to their work.
- Most pupils attend much more regularly than in their previous setting. This helps them to make good progress over time.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Robust procedures are in place and initiatives, such as how to help young girls stay safe, is appreciated by parents and pupils alike.
- The quality of teaching is good. Primary and secondary pupils benefit from well-planned activities, which are meeting their learning needs increasingly well.
- Relationships in school are strong and expectations are high. A good sense of humour permeates through the school and often diffuses situations before problems arise.
- The school's drive to improve skills in literacy and numeracy is proving successful. In 2014, pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 reached broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- By the time pupils leave school in Year 11, they have achieved a wide range of GCSE and vocational qualifications, representing good progress from their starting points.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders have developed a new approach to measuring progress and plotting attainment, bringing together four separate systems into one. This is currently at an early stage of implementation. Leaders recognise the need to keep a careful watch on how well this new system provides robust and reliable information regarding pupils' achievement.
- A small number of inconsistencies remain in the quality of some aspects of teaching across primary and secondary classes. For example, while most pupils receive very clear feedback during lessons about how to improve their work, some marking is not always as helpful.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons or small-group activities. Four of these sessions were conducted jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke to primary and secondary pupils about their learning and looked at work in their books. Inspectors also spoke with older pupils about their views on behaviour and how the school keeps them safe.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, school staff, the Chair of the Management Committee and a representative from the local authority.
- There were too few responses to Ofsted’s online parent questionnaire (Parent View), for inspectors to consider. However, inspectors did meet with a number of parents during the two days.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own information of pupils’ current progress, planning and monitoring, records of behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- Inspectors also took account of the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jim Alexander, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rotherham Aspire opened in January 2014, bringing together two secondary Pupil Referral Units (St Mary's Centre and Riverside Centre) and two primary Pupil Referral Units (The Welcome Centre and Redbarn House). This reorganisation was managed by the local authority.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for children who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average. Typically, needs are linked to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school has significantly more boys than girls, who account for just less than one-quarter of the intake.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language is below average.
- Staff at Rotherham Aspire provide outreach work for other schools within the local authority when the need arises.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve leadership and management, by ensuring that the recently developed system to measure pupils' progress and plot their attainment provides robust and accurate information.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, by making sure that the quality of marking improves, so everyone is clear about what is required to reach even higher standards.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The strong leadership of the headteacher, effectively supported by the deputy headteacher, has ensured that much has been achieved since the school opened. Senior leaders are supported by all staff who are fully committed to the school's ethos. Morale is high and staff are proud of their contribution to pupils' achievements.
- Leaders are effectively focusing on improving the quality of teaching, particularly that of English and mathematics. Arrangements and policies to link staff performance to pay progression have been agreed and implemented. All staff benefit from good training opportunities to undertake further professional development.
- Senior leaders have developed a new system to monitor the progress being made by pupils and to measure the standards they reach. This new system has pulled together the best practice from each of the previous four settings as well as incorporating arrangements relating to the new National Curriculum. However, it is only at a very early stage of implementation and leaders are aware that they will need to keep a careful watch on how well this system is working and to iron out any teething problems.
- Leaders ensure that parents and their children are fully involved in planning what would best meet their individual needs. Parents speak highly of the support their children receive and also how staff 'support and encourage the whole family, not just the children'.
- Middle leaders also play an effective role in managing key aspects of the school's work. The greater emphasis on English and mathematics has been managed by middle leaders, who have established clear policies and schemes of work for teachers to follow.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and care is taken to ensure that pupils are provided with a nurturing and encouraging school life. This, together with the improvements to the quality of teaching, explain why attendance is improving so rapidly.
- The school's curriculum has been redesigned with a clear focus on raising achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, while maintaining a strong vocational provision. A wide range of trips, residential visits and visitors to the school also enriches pupils' time at school. A recent visit from an officer in the Coldstream Guards, for example, provided pupils with a good understanding of how poppy production underpins much of the Afghan economy.
- The benefits of additional funding received, for example the pupil premium and the primary sports funding, are used creatively to help pupils want to engage with their learning. For example, girls are now attending a local gym every week, which is helping to improve their fitness. Individual interests are also being provided for, for example, fishing or boxing. All these activities encourage attendance and enjoyment of school life.
- The reorganisation of the Pupil Referral Unit provision has been effectively overseen by the local authority. Leaders and staff speak positively about the support and encouragement they have received during the period of transition.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - A range of highly experience and well-trained professionals has been appointed to the management committee. The chair of the committee leads by example, with a commitment for excellence. The committee members are very well informed and ask pertinent and challenging questions. They also offer praise and encouragement when due. Committee members have a good oversight of the use of additional funds, for example the pupil premium, and ensure the school provides good value for money. They have supported senior leaders to establish quickly a framework matching teachers' performance with appropriate levels of pay. They ensure that statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most notably, pupils are developing positive attitudes to their work in lessons. They settle quickly to their tasks and do not become easily distracted by what may be happening around them. Work in books also shows they know the value of hard work and obviously take pride in the content and presentation of their work.
- A number of pupils find it difficult to manage their own emotions or behaviour. However, they quickly respond to the support and guidance provided by school staff. They are taught to 'make the right choice' and can build up a collection of reward tokens to spend on school trips and visits. One boy explained 'you

don't get these for nothing; you've got to earn them.' I got four today'. Obviously a day of right choices!

- Attendance, while still below average, is improving quickly. Most pupils have struggled to attend in previous settings and a number have been out of school for lengthy periods of time before they arrive at Rotherham Aspire. School records show that attendance for many is now good. One parent explained that 'since starting (at Rotherham Aspire) it is like having a different child, who wants to come to school every day'.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils have a clear sense of justice and know how to keep themselves safe from bullying. They do not have anxiety about attending the school, and say 'it's a good place to be'.
- There are strong links with outside agencies, such as the Sexual Exploitation Team support, to support staff as they help and guide those that are in most need.
- Many pupils have previously experienced fixed-term or permanent exclusion. At Rotherham Aspire, rates of exclusion are falling quickly and all incidents are reported correctly. Robust systems are in place to record the very few occasions when physical restraint is required.
- Leaders ensure safeguarding requirements are met and staff are well trained.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Good teaching successfully promotes good achievement. Teachers know their pupils well, plan interesting work and make learning fun and enjoyable.
- Teachers in the primary classes have high expectations of pupils. They have used a wide range of literature to promote pupils' reading and encourage their writing. In a Year 5 and Year 6 class, boys were keen to explain that Charles Dickens used stories to describe the living conditions for people in the Victorian period. In their writing, they were then using a wide range of vocabulary to describe a setting.
- Teachers have similarly high expectations of pupils in the secondary classes. They match their teaching carefully to both the requirements for examination courses and also the needs of individuals, so work is neither too easy nor too hard.
- The quality of marking is improving quickly, but inconsistencies still remain. Some pupils have very clear guidance about what steps should be taken to improve their work, for example, in their interactive media website designs. Staff and pupils engage in constructive conversation about how work could be improved. However, there remain some examples where pupils' hard work is only marked with a tick or a 'well done', which does not provide clear enough guidance for improvement.
- Many pupils tend to lack confidence in their basic skills. Teachers emphasise the importance of good literacy and numeracy skills and systematically plan opportunities to extend these skills in other subjects across the curriculum. For example, pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling is promoted through a topic on 'body image in the media' in personal, social and health education.
- The teaching of mathematics is also improving at a fast pace. Teachers have identified those pupils that are capable of reaching higher standards and arrangements are in place to help them achieve their full potential.
- Teaching assistants, support and pastoral staff are deployed to good effect, complementing the work of teachers in class. They know the pupils well and recognise the signs of when inappropriate behaviour might be triggered; they intervene speedily to ensure that a positive focus on right choices and learning is quickly resumed.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- When pupils join the school, their attainment can vary widely but is typically much lower than that expected for their age. They have usually been underachieving because their education has been disrupted by exclusion or poor attendance at a previous school.
- Regardless of their starting points, the vast majority settle quickly, are provided with the right support and soon start to make good progress. Some find it harder to settle but, again, the support and encouragement they receive helps their self-confidence to develop. This in turn successfully promotes their academic achievement.
- Across Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils making the progress expected of them is close to average. A number are now also making much better than expected progress, which is helping them to catch up quickly with the standards they ought to be reaching for their age.

- Attainment by the end of Year 6 in 2014 was close to average in reading, writing and mathematics, which represents good progress from these pupils' starting points.
- By the time pupils leave Year 11, they have gained a wide range of GCSE and vocational qualifications, which prepare them well for either the next stage of their education or in work life.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding effectively to help disadvantaged pupils to achieve well. By the end of Year 6, gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in their class have closed, although they remain 16 months behind other pupils nationally. By the end of Year 11, gaps have once again closed within school, but the disadvantaged pupils were some three years behind other pupils nationally. However, the numbers of pupils in some year groups are very small and this makes such comparisons difficult.
- The school has identified its most able pupils and is providing work at a higher level for them. Effective partnerships with other schools are also helping to provide the right level of challenge for the most able pupils. For example, the most able mathematicians attend weekly lessons at Wickersley School and Sports College.
- There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups. Boys, girls, those from minority ethnic groups and those looked after by the local authority make progress at a similar rate to others in the school and achieve equally well.

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	137823
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	447783

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	6–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Blackwell
Headteacher	Paul Bloor
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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