

Rugeley School

Blithbury Rd, Staffordshire WS15 3JQ

Inspection dates 18–19 November 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders and governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Rigorous systems for checking on all aspects of the school's work are in place. As a result, the school is improving rapidly and all aspects of its work are good.
- Leaders check on the quality of teaching and learning particularly well. Good attention to staff training and improvements in the curriculum and assessment mean that learning is well tailored to pupils' needs in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is good because teachers have a strong understanding of how to support the learning of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. Excellent relationships ensure that pupils make good and sometimes better progress in managing their anxieties and own behaviour.
- Teaching staff and therapists work well together so that pupils' emotional well-being and communication skills improve rapidly.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in academic and practical subjects. Many make outstanding progress in their communication and social relationships, using symbols and technology well to support them.
- Throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with the most complex special educational needs achieve at least as well as others.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe and secure are very effective. Pupils are helped to manage their behaviour extremely well. Behaviour is good. Pupils are well cared for and well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Parents say their children cannot wait to come to school. They are pleased with the improvements in communication and the school's work since the new Principal arrived.
- Post-16 learners make good progress in their life skills because the good provision is highly focused on preparing them for their next steps.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some planned improvements such as those to the organisation of pupil groups and to some aspects of assessment have yet to be fully implemented.
- Not all staff make fully effective use of the assessment information available in different subjects about each pupil. As a result, work is occasionally too easy or too hard or is not linked sufficiently to pupils' targets in subjects. A few pupils' progress, as a result, is not as rapid as it could be.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by ensuring that guidance and training provided to teachers about the use of assessment data enable all teachers to:
 - be confident and accurate in the checking of pupils' learning and skills
 - plan work that consistently builds on pupils' prior learning, is at the right level of challenge and is linked to pupils' next steps.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The new Principal has quickly established an ethos of high expectations and ambition for all pupils. He and governors are determined that every pupil should achieve as much as possible, in line with the school's aims and values. They have already put much in place to promote this. Many staff indicated in their responses to staff questionnaires that the school has improved considerably in a very short time. This is because the leadership is focused on helping staff to improve and has inspired them to do so.
- Leaders and the governors check carefully that the independent school standards are met. School self-evaluation is highly accurate and identifies clearly the most important things to be done. It is based on an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and of pupils' progress.
- A new electronic system for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress supports leaders' evaluation of the strengths of the school well. Leaders have worked hard to improve the skills of staff in assessing pupils' progress. They are clear that not all staff are wholly accurate when checking pupils' work or devising tasks to engage and challenge each pupil. This means that some pupils waste time doing work that is too easy or too hard. Occasionally, tasks appear to have a limited connection with pupils' targets or with what pupils have learned before.
- The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is good. Schemes of work are in place for all subjects, although in differing detail. The range of qualifications that pupils can study at the school or in the post-16 provision has been extended to ensure opportunities for progressively higher qualifications, whether in English or mathematics or in their vocational work.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and covers all the subjects that it should. It has a good emphasis on helping pupils to apply their understanding and skills in a range of subjects and contexts such as in the local community. As a result, pupils make good progress in aspects such as using and applying their mathematical skills or in using symbols in a range of contexts. An important and highly effective part of the curriculum is the specialist work for supporting pupils' achievement in 'learning for life.' This includes the 'sensory curriculum' for those with the most complex needs, but also the ways in which pupils' resilience, independence, self-expression and understanding are supported.
- The curriculum and the management of pupils' behaviour are underpinned by the use of physical education and exercise to support routine, engagement, relaxation and learning. Pupils are visibly calmed when part of such routines and more tolerant of noise and others as a result.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school develops pupils' self-awareness and their social skills particularly well because of the ways in which staff model values such as mutual respect and tolerance. Work experience, the community inclusion work, the use of visits and visitors, as well as the study of themes in life skills or in humanities, all help pupils to be more aware of British values and institutions and of different cultures and traditions, and to be more flexible and tolerant themselves.
- Leaders ensure that learners have the resources that they need in order to learn, including access to therapy. No individual is disadvantaged within the school and discrimination is not tolerated. There is an appropriate and improving emphasis on careers advice, including impartial advice. Careful working with placing authorities and with families helps to ensure that all planning takes careful account of pupils' interests and preferences.
- Pupils' safety and well-being are paramount. The school makes all the required checks on staff, governors and volunteers and records these meticulously. The school's safeguarding and child protection policies are all available on the website and are based on the most up-to-date guidance. Staff are ever vigilant in checking on pupil safety and in drawing up risk assessments where needed. Leaders have been proactive in putting their own Prevent audit and programmes in place, identifying pupils they feel might be at risk and working quietly with other authorities such as social care and the police to implement programmes both for individuals and for groups.
- Parents who spoke with the inspector, and others who responded to the school's own questionnaire, agree that their children are kept safe. They praise the improvements in communication since the new Principal took over.

■ The governance of the school:

- is provided by the national and regional quality-assurance representatives for the company and the regional operational representative. A system of weekly reports, monthly visits and larger biannual meetings ensures that governors provide high-quality support and appropriate challenge to leaders. They are well informed about strengths and areas for development. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and of how good outcomes are. They hold both teachers and the Principal to account through the school's appraisal and salary review system
- utilises good links with other schools within the group to allow senior and middle leaders to work in partnership with others, for example when considering the most effective ways of monitoring progress at post-16
- has ensured, along with the proprietors, that good-quality, secure premises are available for pupils and that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All required policies regarding the prevention of bullying, the use of physical restraint and the management of complaints are in place
- has ensured that arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective and that staff and governors are appropriately trained
- ensures that all of the independent school regulations are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers and teaching assistants are quick to form highly positive relationships with pupils, many of whom have had negative experiences in previous placements. Most staff are highly experienced in providing for the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions and skilled in using visual support, as well as physical exercise and routines to support pupils.
- Careful management of transition into school, for example through assigning keyworkers, also ensures that pupils' interests, needs and starting points are established and their confidence gained. The new assessments in place and the use of specialist assessments on entry all help to ensure that teachers increasingly have access to up-to-date information from the pupils' entry.
- Strengths of teaching lie in the support for communication and in the expert ways in which teachers manage pupils' behaviour and support their attitudes to learning. Signs, symbols and technology are used well to help each pupil communicate their ideas or to understand. Staff are expert at looking for the smallest communication from individual pupils and are quick to extend and comment on it, or celebrate it, when pupils do offer a response, whether verbal or non-verbal. For those pupils who have some speech, teachers are adept at helping them to improve on their ideas, using probing questions and cues to help them to express themselves further.
- Not all teachers use assessment data to best effect, however. Occasionally, both pupils in school and learners in the sixth form have work that is not so well matched to their needs. For a few, this slows learning as the work is too easy. For other pupils, the work is sometimes too hard. In the most successful learning, teachers and teaching assistants gave pupils just enough help for them to discover the answers for themselves.
- Excellent teamwork between teaching assistants and teachers in classrooms ensures that everyone is clear about their role and ever alert to pupil anxiety or possible waning interest. This makes the classroom learning environment a highly personalised one in which each pupil has individualised materials and resources for learning. In a Key Stage 3 English lesson, for example, pupils had their own story books. In another Key Stage 3 lesson, pupils had glove puppets, new technology, pictures and symbols to support each one as needed. They retold the story with enthusiasm, each at their own level, and with obvious enjoyment.
- Pupils enjoy learning and increasingly feel safe to learn in different ways because staff are skilled at finding the balance between allowing pupils choices about their work and helping them to develop more flexibility as learners. Teaching assistants are particularly skilled in identifying when a pupil needs some time to walk or jog outside or indeed could do some calming exercises in the classroom. Pupils come back ready to re-engage within a few minutes and usually settle down to productive learning. All this means that pupils make considerable gains in their learning compared with their progress before attending the school.

- Mathematics, reading and writing are taught systematically and well. Pupils have many opportunities to apply and develop these skills in different subjects. Symbols, in particular, are used well to help pupils to become independent as readers. They help pupils to know and understand what will happen during the day or what they need to make a cake in food technology, for example.
- Teaching and learning in life skills are a strength. This supports pupils' independence and inclusion in the community. Pupils' practical experiences are designed to help them to use their skills with confidence and for a real purpose. Post-16 learners, for example, meet and greet visitors at Lichfield Cathedral, or help to keep the grounds attractive and clear of litter. Photographic recording helps these learners to recall and talk about their experiences or prepare for them with their teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school is particularly successful in helping pupils to improve their self-esteem, their attendance and their attitudes to school.
- Staff have good skills and understanding of how to interact with, and support, the learning and well-being of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. They treat all pupils with the utmost care and respect and model this in their interactions with each other. This means that pupils develop trust and respect for those around them.
- Pupils form particularly strong relationships with their keyworkers. This was observed many times during the inspection when pupils struggled with their anxieties but mastered these sufficiently to 'have a go at' and complete work because of the skilful support from the adults supporting them.
- Parents praise the strides in personal development that their children make whilst at the school. One said that the school had given them hope for their child's future. They also praise the care and concern that the school displays for every pupil. The inspector observed many practical ways in which the school promoted pupils' emotional well-being. Staff monitor pupils' anxiety levels very carefully and are careful to explain to them what is happening and why.
- There is a good careers programme in place, including work experience, links to colleges and access to impartial advice. Parents feel supported towards helping their children to make choices or making them for them. Personal development is not outstanding, however, because there are times when individual pupils could do more for themselves in their work. Occasionally, it has not been set at the right level of challenge and they have to rely too heavily on the support of others to complete it.
- The school is ever vigilant in the safeguarding of pupils. It works well with the local authority, colleagues in social care and other agencies to keep pupils safe. All the required staff training is in place and updated regularly.
- Pupils are helped to understand about e-safety, grooming, radicalisation and extremism. During the inspection, two members of the police visited to talk with individual pupils and plan ways forward with staff.
- Detailed, good-quality risk assessments are carried out on the premises for any visits and for individual pupils as required. All the required health and safety policies and practices are in place, including those relating to fire safety. The school has a full-time nurse, as well as therapists. A paediatrician visits regularly to review individual pupils at the school and review any actions needed relating to medical conditions and the prescription of drugs. This means less time is missed from school for medical appointments. Pupils become less anxious about these appointments because they take place in familiar surroundings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils often arrive with very challenging behaviours. Some have been excluded from their previous schools, been on part-time timetables or have attended minimally. The change in attitudes to learning for these pupils is marked. Their attendance is at least as good as others of their age nationally. Parents say that their child loves to come to this school and are extremely pleased with the improvements in their child's behaviour.

- The school is a calm and orderly environment because staff are very well deployed and quick to anticipate if a learner is becoming upset. This means if incidents do occur, they rarely disrupt the learning of others. As pupils get older and settle into the school's ways, they begin to manage their behaviour themselves, asking to go out for a short walk or to a calming room.
- Pupils have their own behaviour plan and staff manage behaviour consistently well, in line with these. This consistency helps pupils develop strategies for managing their own behaviour and to understand the difference between right and wrong. This all supports their being able to maintain their placement when they leave the school.
- There are no recorded instances of bullying and parents and staff confirm these are rare. No unkindness or conflict between pupils was observed during the inspection. Staffing levels mean that staff can intervene swiftly when necessary. Incident logs show that pupils improve their behaviour significantly over their time at the school.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Some pupils' progress slowed after the last inspection when there was a period of instability and several changes in teaching staff and leaders. New governors and new school leaders have acted swiftly to rectify this. Outcomes for pupils are good for all groups of pupils, including those who are eligible for the pupil premium.
- Pupils achieve so well throughout the school, including in the sixth form, because the school personalises the learning for them. Staff are skilled at extending each pupil's attention and interest so that their attitudes to learning improve remarkably, and they concentrate better and so learn more.
- Progress in English is good throughout the school. Higher attainers read out loud and with accuracy, for example, from a simple class story book. They can sort coins and match them to their value and solve simple number bond problems. Others read or sign back their work in science, using symbols to help them. Pupils use symbols to write single words and phrases or copy individual sentences. Higher attainers can write simple sentences about their work. Lower attainers match objects, pictures and numbers or make choices between two objects or pictures.
- Key Stage 2 pupils show that they are developing key vocabulary linked to their projects through pictures, symbols or words. Higher attainers retain simple facts. Older pupils recognise alternative endings and story twists in work linked to fairy tales. In science, Key Stage 4 pupils follow their teachers well and learn about the characteristics of different fruits, for example.
- An important part of the school's curriculum is the personal, social, health and economic education and life skills programme and the ways in which the school prepares its pupils for a more independent life. Parents praise the life skills and community inclusion programmes because these help their children develop the 'ordinary' skills of life. In particular, pupils learn table manners, how to conduct themselves in different situations and how to communicate effectively with others.
- Older pupils follow different pathways according to their levels and needs. Almost all take some form of qualification at Key Stage 4, usually a unit award programme. Post-16 learners take Entry Level 1 and additional unit awards. All take courses to improve their independence, such as independent travel programmes, wherever possible. This all means pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education or training.

Sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form provision has been strengthened by the introduction of new courses and new ways of checking on progress. The data generated show that current learners are making good progress from their starting points. This is because teaching in the sixth form helps pupils to become mature in their attitudes and behaviour.
- The sixth form provision is focused on ensuring that learners' independent living and learning skills are as well developed as possible. Learners consolidate earlier learning by applying it in different contexts and subjects, including on work experience and in the community. They also gain qualifications such as Entry Level 1 life skills, English and mathematics. Mini-enterprise skills help them to experience the world of work and to apply their knowledge of money and other mathematical skills.

- Learners in the sixth form improve their behaviour well as a result of the strong guidance from and high expectations of staff. Learners become self-aware and conscious of the strategies they can use to help them to lessen their anxiety or manage their own behaviour. They understand that they must do everything they can do to keep themselves safe.
- Where individual learners have particular talents or interests, such as for computing, horse-riding, physical education or art, courses are identified so that they can develop these skills further, including through their college 'taster' courses, work experience and voluntary work. This all helps learners to be clearer about what they wish to do when they leave the school.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The post-16 leader works well with local services and parents to secure learners' transition into education or training. Most go on to further education and to college courses local to them.

School details

Unique reference number	132735
Inspection number	10006039
DfE registration number	860/6024

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent school
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of learners in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory Education Services Ltd
Chair	John Anderson
Headteacher	Charlie Rivers
Annual fees (day pupils)	£90,000
Telephone number	01889 504400
Website	www.priorygroup.com
Email address	rugeleyhorizon@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	28–29 November 2012

Information about this school

- Rugeley School opened in 2000 as an independent residential special school.
- The school is registered to take up to 50 pupils aged five to 19 years. At the time of this inspection, there were 41 pupils aged eight to 19 years on the roll of the school. Just under half were in the post-16 provision. All learners have a statement of special educational need, although a small number are currently in the process of moving to an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils who attend the school are drawn from a number of authorities in the West Midlands and East Midlands. A few come from much further afield, such as from inner or outer London boroughs.
- The school admits pupils who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum or associated conditions. Often these pupils have other learning difficulties or barriers to learning, such as challenging behaviours, severe learning difficulties and/or severe speech, language and communication delays. Its approach to learning sees physical activity as the 'cornerstone of the curriculum'. The school's aims are that pupils will 'achieve an enhanced degree of emotional stability through an active approach to learning'.
- Just under a half of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support the achievement of pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority). The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage with about a quarter from a range of other ethnic backgrounds including mixed race, Asian, African and other European heritages.

- The school does not use alternative provision, although its learners do attend taster courses at Strathmore College, a sixth form college run by the proprietor. The school has links with local businesses and Lichfield Cathedral for work experience and has its own forest school provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place at one day's notice. The inspector observed lessons in all classes within the school, as well as making shorter visits to sample learning in the range of subjects taught. A senior leader accompanied her on these observations and visits.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, the senior leadership team, a representative of the governing body and proprietor, and the designated leads for safeguarding and for behaviour. In addition, the inspector had discussions with the lead teachers for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions and for children who are in the care of the local authority.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey for these responses to be analysed. However, the inspector spoke with three parents by telephone or face to face during the inspection and had access to the school's own recent survey.
- The views of pupils were gained through observation and informal means, as well as a small number of questionnaire responses, supported by symbols and examination of the school's own pupil-voice file.
- The inspector examined the information the school collects about pupils' progress. She also looked at a range of pupils' work both in lessons and separately to provide evidence of progress. Detailed case studies and pupil records were considered to further explore progress over time and the ways in which the school works with parents, carers and placing authorities, including social care.
- The views of staff were gathered through meetings and their responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- The inspector checked compliance with the independent school standards. She examined a range of school documentation, including those relating to the school's curriculum, behaviour, safeguarding, health and safety and complaints, and the ways in which it holds its staff accountable for pupils' progress and for the quality of teaching and learning.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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