

Rowan Tree Primary School

Green Hall Close, Atherton, Manchester M46 9HP

Inspection dates

12–13 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Rowan Tree lives up to its school motto, 'Learning from everything we do by making every moment matter', in all it does.
- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders has created a climate of high expectations, a love of learning and an insistence that barriers can be broken so that every pupil can achieve their best.
- Governors are passionate about the school. They know it well and make a valuable contribution to school improvement.
- The professional development of staff has enabled them to grow into highly skilled practitioners who share a sense of creativity and passion for learning.
- The combination of excellent assessment practice and a vibrant curriculum ensures that pupils' complex learning needs are expertly catered for. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress from their often low starting points.
- The school's work to develop pupils' communication skills is exemplary. In developing these skills, teachers adeptly reduce pupils' barriers to learning.
- The strong relationships that staff cultivate with pupils mean that they know them extremely well. The care and support provided by staff ensure that Rowan Tree is a safe and nurturing place in which pupils can flourish.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour with expertise. In turn, pupils conduct themselves extremely well in class and around school. Many are able to regulate their own behaviour.
- The promotion of pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Personal development, including the teaching of life skills, is interwoven into all aspects of school life and learning.
- Good leadership and teaching in the early years create a stimulating learning environment and ensure that children have a strong start to school life. The high-quality systems used in the rest of the school are becoming more deeply embedded in the early years.
- Although outcomes are outstanding overall, opportunities are sometimes missed to extend the most able pupils by asking them more challenging questions and encouraging them to think more deeply about their work.
- Attendance is above national averages for special schools. However, there are a small group of pupils who are persistently absent.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that teachers maximise opportunities to extend the most able pupils, particularly by asking challenging questions or setting tasks that require them to think more deeply about their work.
- Continue to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently missing school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The inspiring leadership of the headteacher and her determination to provide the very best for all pupils have resulted in Rowan Tree Primary School being an exceptional place to learn. Leaders' passion, commitment and strong sense of fun enthuse staff. Leaders and teachers, working together, remove barriers to learning and create a nurturing environment where pupils feel secure to grow and learn.
- Leaders believe that each individual child is unique. They foster values of equality and diversity which in turn ensure that pupils develop the capacity to be caring, considerate, respectful and tolerant of each other and of others in the wider community.
- Leaders are highly respected. They have secured the commitment of staff, parents and pupils. This contributes to the very positive motivation of all staff and the determination for continual improvement. The school benefits from a stable, happy and dedicated team of staff where relationships are very strong. Staff are unanimous in the pride they feel working at Rowan Tree. They feel very well supported and consider that the school is extremely well led and managed.
- Senior leaders know the school extremely well. The strengths and areas for improvement are identified accurately and are reflected in the detailed school development plan. There are regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Staff benefit from a range of high-quality training and are encouraged to contribute to developing the school through working together and introducing new ideas. This has resulted in staff playing an important part in the school's success.
- Middle leaders are collaborative, enthusiastic and feel highly accountable for pupils' learning and for continued school improvement. They have regular opportunities to develop their areas of responsibility, talk to governors and check that agreed strategies to secure improvement are being applied consistently by all staff.
- The school's comprehensive and innovative assessment system is a strength. It is used highly effectively to assess all aspects of each pupil's needs, such as the development of skills in communication, language, literacy and numeracy, levels of independence and the use of hydrotherapy. Leaders and staff use the assessment information they constantly and meticulously collect to update their knowledge of pupils' progress and to plan pupils' next steps in learning. As a result, staff know pupils exceptionally well and use this information to deliver a highly relevant and personalised curriculum for each individual learner.
- The school offers a rich, broad and balanced curriculum that is vibrant and stimulating to learners no matter what their barriers to learning might be. The curriculum is further enriched by providing regular sensory or real-life experiences to aid pupils' understanding and skill development. The curriculum is also joyful and exciting. As one pupil explained, 'This school is all about fun.' All curriculum areas are assessed to the same high standard. This information is used effectively by curriculum leaders to highlight development needs within a subject or aspect and to assess the progress of pupils.

- The excellent promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven through all the school's activities. Consequently, the school provides a calm, considerate and thoughtful environment where pupils mix happily together. Pupils are actively involved in the school community, which contributes to developing and promoting the school's values alongside British values. For example, pupils are proud to be elected as members of the school council or to be selected as playground or reading buddies for younger pupils. Through assemblies and the curriculum, including the teaching of life skills, pupils learn about the wider community and raise funds for charities. In addition, they learn about tolerance, respect of differences and the rule of law.
- Pupil premium funding is used very effectively to reduce any barriers to learning that may be experienced by disadvantaged pupils. The progress of pupils supported by this funding is monitored rigorously. The impact of pupil premium funding is evaluated carefully by the headteacher and governors. The constructive use of this funding enables disadvantaged pupils to be successful and to be part of everything the school has to offer.
- The primary school physical education (PE) and sport funding is used creatively to provide pupils with a range of sporting and physical activities that they might not otherwise have access to, for example experiencing a trampoline in a therapy programme, as well as cycling, cheerleading and horse or carriage riding.
- Leaders use additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively to provide additional staffing and resources to successfully support pupils' individual needs.
- The support from the local authority is appropriate and helpful. The school's excellent practice in special educational needs, and in particular providing for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, is highly valued by the local authority. As a result, the school shares its expertise with other schools by offering an outreach provision. The school plays a full part within a network of local schools and a larger Greater Manchester group of special schools. These schools support each other in a range of areas, for example, working together to develop practice and checks with regard to assessment.

Governance of the school

- Governors are highly effective and make an important contribution to raising standards in the school.
- Governors know their school extremely well and are confident and skilled to ask challenging questions. The attributes of the individual governors have been utilised very well to ensure that their expertise benefits the school. Governors are confident to be involved in all aspects of the school's development and in the monitoring of improvement.
- Governors have a good understanding of performance management procedures and, as well as holding teachers and leaders to account, they ensure that the management of teachers' pay is effective.
- Governors are conscientious and take part in relevant training on good governance practice and understanding school assessment. As a result, governors have good levels of understanding about the progress pupils are making. They also make sure that any

additional funding is spent effectively and makes a difference to pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority in the school. Leaders have ensured that pupils have a very safe and secure environment by effectively promoting the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements and security checks on staff are meticulous, and records are robust and secure. Staff and governors undertake regular and appropriate training, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism.
- A dedicated team of staff, including a pastoral support worker, oversees the care and welfare of vulnerable pupils and families. They offer excellent support and are highly valued. A number of parents commented that staff 'go above and beyond' in their efforts to help and support pupils and families.
- Leaders are persistent in cases where the school is concerned for a pupil's welfare. Highly effective relationships with other agencies and with parents ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching and learning at Rowan Tree are outstanding. All adults have the same high expectations that pupils will learn and achieve to their full potential. Thorough, detailed assessment, a vibrant curriculum and teachers' ability to bring this together to deliver relevant and exciting learning experiences make a winning combination for the school.
- The teaching at Rowan Tree is characterised by friendly, warm relationships between staff and pupils. The extremely well-organised lessons very effectively balance the needs of the different ages and abilities of pupils within each class. Resources are thoughtfully prepared and always to hand so that no time is wasted and pupils do not drift off task. For example, a class registration activity included a range of press buttons, colourful shakers, an electronic tablet and a toy camel in a box. All were immediately available and were expertly juggled to ensure that pupils' attention was successfully captured.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work in strong accord, bringing a consistency of approach and expectation to pupils. Their deep knowledge of pupils' targets and next steps in learning, coupled with their expertise in communicating through signs and symbols, makes sure that pupils get the most out of learning experiences and activities.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils' learning. This includes identifying any barriers to learning and, in particular, behavioural barriers that can be reduced by offering a sensory break. Adults offer pupils an opportunity to calm down and refocus by allowing them to step away from an activity for a specific time and complete a different individual activity to calm them. These include, for example, taking a walk, playing with a favourite object or activity or letting off steam in a soft play area.
- Pupils' day-to-day workbooks and achievement records are exemplary. They are full of

pictures with annotated comments about how well pupils have completed their work and every entry offers a next step to secure further learning. A learning focus for all pupils is to become as independent as they can be. Pupils' steps in gaining independence are also recorded meticulously. From this assessment information, leaders and teachers plan with precision how they are going to systematically move each pupil towards greater autonomy.

- A strength of the school is how teachers and teaching assistants deliver and develop pupils' communication skills. A range of communication aids are offered to pupils such as using signs, symbols and objects of reference. Adults capably use these systems in lessons. For example, when a group of pupils watched a video clip telling the story of King Midas, the teacher skilfully signed and presented objects of reference to the animation to support pupils' understanding. This level of communication is consistent around school, in corridors, in the school hall and outside.
- The development of reading, writing and mathematical skills is a high priority in school. Pupils are helped to read through effective phonics teaching. Pupils say they enjoy reading and are encouraged to read by their teacher. Story books are used effectively in each class to create a range of interesting and stimulating activities. Mathematics lessons are popular with pupils. These lessons are well-resourced so that pupils have plenty of opportunity to learn mathematical concepts such as addition and subtraction in a practical way. However, occasionally, the most able pupils are not challenged enough in their reading, writing and mathematics lessons. This is because teachers sometimes miss opportunities to ask more challenging questions of pupils or to set them tasks that encourage them to think through problems by themselves.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View or spoke to the inspector felt that their children were well-taught. Most felt that the quality of information given to them about their children's learning was valuable and of a good quality.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This is because pupils' personal development, welfare and life skills are considered the key to unlocking pupils' potential. Teachers' deep knowledge of pupils and the strong relationships that they build, ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive and succeed.
- Staff treat pupils with the utmost consideration and ensure that the school makes everyone feel welcome and valued. Adults constantly model respectful and caring behaviour in the way they engage with pupils. As a result, pupils are happy and calm and behave in a similar caring way.
- The gentleness and consideration that the older pupils display to younger ones is a striking strength of the school. For example, many older pupils are reading buddies to younger ones or take on the responsibility of being a playground buddy. These roles are supportive to the younger members of school and the responsibility is valued highly by the older pupils. 'We feel good inside when we help the little ones,' was a typical sentiment.

- Most parents spoken to by inspectors and those parents that responded to Parent View expressed praise for the school and the work of the staff. Parents felt that their children were safe, happy and well-looked-after. A number of parents were keen to say that their children were thriving. They put this down to the staff's skills at nurturing and building confidence. Parents say that this is also because staff are dedicated to doing the best for all of the children.
- The vast majority of pupils are confident, happy learners. Pupils told inspectors that they liked their school very much and indicated that they were looked after well by adults. They said staff were 'kind' and 'always help you'. Pupils were unanimous in their view that they felt safe in school and described it as an 'awesome', 'exciting' place to be.
- Good-quality transition is considered an essential element in ensuring that pupils and families feel well prepared for the next steps in education. Central to this is ensuring that their welfare needs are met. Time is spent ensuring that children and families have a positive experience and feel welcomed when they join the school and confident and self-assured when moving on to secondary education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils conduct themselves extremely well around school and consequently it is a calm and relaxed place. All pupils are taught to regulate their own behaviour. Many of them do this with an impressive level of self-possession. When pupils are starting to get anxious within a lesson and cannot settle, they can indicate to an adult that they need a 'sensory break'. They can choose how they would do this and the breaks are timed. In a short time, the pupils rejoin the class calmer and eager to learn. This exemplifies the school's central belief that if pupils learn to take control of their behaviour, this breaks down barriers to learning and opens them up to future opportunities.
- Many pupils are aware of how to behave and cannot wait to collect class credits and reward points for good behaviour such as making good choices, hard work and being helpful to others. The school's records show that incidents of inappropriate behaviour are very infrequent. This, in part, is due to the expertise of adults to support pupils with their behaviour and to get pupils back on task quickly and without incident.
- Pupils' attitude to learning is of a high standard. Pupils try their utmost to engage in lessons. Their attention and interest are skilfully captured by providing just the right level of excitement and fun in activities. Around school, in the dining area and outside in the playground, pupils respond well to the consistent, well-established routines that are upheld by all adults. The open spaces inside and outside of school have been thoughtfully designed to ensure that pupils do not feel anxious. For example, in the dining room some pupils benefit from partitioning around their table so that they do not feel overwhelmed by the large space of the hall. Adults support pupils in making the most of their playtimes, whether they choose to socialise or play games.
- Attendance is currently above that of other pupils nationally in special schools, although it can fluctuate year-on-year. The systems for monitoring absence are meticulous and robust. The pastoral support worker provides excellent liaison between families, the school and professionals who can offer support to those that need it. Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in school. However, there is a

group of pupils who are persistently absent. They are picked up quickly and leaders have worked hard with this group of pupils and their parents, with some notable successes. However, a small number of pupils still do not attend school regularly enough.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Leaders meticulously measure pupils' progress and outcomes. This includes academic progress, personal development including life skills and the overall effectiveness of pupils' learning. These thorough assessments and the strong interplay between them and the highly personalised curriculum for each pupil ensure that pupils' achievement, from very low starting points, and in the vast majority of groups, is usually outstanding.
- The school's tracking and end-of-year outcomes show that pupils make good progress and the vast majority, regardless of their specific need, make outstanding progress. This includes the separate groups of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, those who have severe learning difficulties and others who have autistic spectrum disorder. This is confirmed by evidence in pupils' workbooks.
- The most able pupils make at least good progress in English and mathematics. Evidence in their writing and mathematics books indicates that they can use simple addition and subtraction and name different shapes and their properties. In writing, pupils can form letters effectively, write simple sentences and make simple deductions. For example, pupils were asked to think of a sentence to put into a speech bubble indicating what the cartoon superhero might say next. Pupils are well supported to develop their phonics and practise their reading skills. They are encouraged to read and are provided with regular opportunities to do so. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to be done to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently and achieve all of which they are capable.
- From their individual starting points, the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged and children looked after is similar to that of their peers because of the quality of support they receive.
- Outcomes are assessed in all subjects, indicating that pupils make equally strong progress across the curriculum, including, for example, in science, music, physical education and art. Pupils' outcomes in personal development and life skills are also meticulously recorded, as is their growing acquisition of independence. This holistic approach enables teachers to track every aspect of pupils' learning in detail and adapt it in a highly personalised way to ensure that pupils are supported to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Assessments feed into a review of pupils' targets and individual education plans each half term. This ensures that the highly personalised individual plans are responsive to every indication of progress and the learning gains can be capitalised on swiftly. At the end of the year, this information culminates in a school report that covers every aspect of the pupil's achievement including his or her 'wow' moments. Parents are given a beautifully presented record of achievement for their child, outlining all their positive achievements. As one parent described, 'It is great to hear all the things my child can do.'

Early years provision

Good

- A new early years department is in the process of being developed. Practice and procedures are at an earlier stage of development than in the rest of the school and not yet fully embedded. Practice in the early years is good and is improving rapidly. Highly appropriate and focused action is already underway to ensure that the early years matches the excellent provision elsewhere in the school.
- At the time of the inspection, due to extensive refurbishment, only a small number of children were attending the early years, with more children being due to start school the following week. Provision was located in temporary accommodation with ample access to outdoor space.
- Children start school with skills and knowledge that are well below the typical starting points for children their age. Most children have significant difficulty in socialisation and communication. Children benefit from a calm and welcoming environment in which to learn. Adults' detailed understanding of the needs and sensitivities of the children and their high expectations of what children can do ensure that they quickly start to thrive and enjoy a positive start to school life. By the time they leave the early years, they are making good progress.
- The early years is led with knowledge and confidence. Leaders have a clear view of the strengths of the provision and know how to improve children's learning successfully. These improvements are based on a thorough understanding of children's development, and offer the flexibility to adapt the teaching to the individual needs of children.
- Safeguarding is effective and the arrangements mirror those in place for the whole school. Staff are trained well in how to care for and keep children safe. As a result, children's welfare and safety needs are met sensitively by a team of caring adults. Risk assessments are appropriate and the classrooms and the outdoors provide a safe environment, while still allowing children to try out new experiences and take appropriate risks.
- Adults know the children very well. They assess children's abilities, skills and needs prior to them joining the school, so that when they start, personalised provision and learning opportunities are ready and waiting. Assessment information is gathered and used effectively to plan an individual curriculum for children that is both interesting and takes account of their next steps in learning.
- Leaders have ensured that additional funding is used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged children are provided with resources and support so that they make similar levels of progress from their starting points to their peers.
- Teaching is effective. Adults quickly establish routines so that children begin to build strong relationships with adults. High importance is placed on developing children's communication skills. As in the rest of school, this is considered crucial in order to break down barriers to learning and get children ready and willing to learn.
- Provision is well organised to create a rich, sensory-based learning environment for all children both inside and outdoors. A wide range of activities are offered which are both stimulating and fun. For example, children were encouraged to feel, smell and taste

strawberry jelly and also to feel what it is like to jump in a muddy puddle. Children were supported to absorb themselves in the experience, while adults expertly kept a clear focus on the aim of the activity for each individual child. This might be as simple as establishing eye contact or following an instruction.

- Adults work hard to establish strong, positive relationships with parents. This begins at the time of transition when visits are made to the home and the setting that a child has come from. Leaders have an individual approach to introducing new parents and children to the school according to each family's needs and preferences. Leaders offer opportunities to involve parents in their child's learning, by encouraging parents to come into the classroom for stay and play sessions and whole-school family learning days. Parents are also introduced to the pastoral support provided by the school so that relationships can be built and support and advice can be offered from the start of their child's school career.

School details

Unique reference number	131295
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10032454

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pamela Hough
Headteacher	Liz Loftus
Telephone number	01942 883 928
Website	www.rowantree.wigan.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@admin.rowantree.wigan.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with a significant degree of complex learning difficulty, many of whom have autistic spectrum disorder. Some pupils have severe learning difficulties and a few have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low.
- Boys considerably outnumber girls.
- Nearly a half of all the pupils on roll are identified as disadvantaged.
- Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a reorganisation. The school previously catered for key stage 3 pupils but now only provides for primary-aged pupils and children in the early years. As part of these adjustments, the school changed its

name from New Greenhall to Rowan Tree Primary School.

- The early years department is undergoing extensive building work. This has added two classrooms to the existing one. At the time of the inspection, none of these classrooms were open.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in classes. They observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and assessed the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors also observed pupils in the playground and during lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and in the 'learning journeys' of children in the early years.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, special educational needs coordinator and the pastoral support worker. They also spoke to the early years leader and curriculum leaders.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body and other governors. Telephone conversations were held with representatives of the local authority.
- Small groups of pupils discussed their opinions about the school and their learning with inspectors. Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils in the playground and around school.
- Inspectors took account of the 41 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- They also took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector talked briefly with a few parents at the end of the school day and took into consideration parents' views expressed in a recent questionnaire collected by the school.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including minutes from meetings of the governing body, information on pupils' progress, the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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