

Rugeley School

Blithbury Road, Blithbury, Rugeley, Staffordshire WS15 3JQ

Inspection dates

10–12 October 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies across the school and outcomes are not consistently good. Teachers have had too few opportunities to share the most effective practice to improve their teaching skills. Some objectives for learning lack clarity and there is scope for greater challenge.
- Outcomes are variable. Over time, leaders have not adequately monitored pupils' achievement with sufficient frequency to ensure that most pupils achieve well.
- Information about pupils' achievement has not been moderated sufficiently well in the past. Though this situation is rapidly improving, new systems need to be embedded further.
- Leaders' plans for improvement lack precision. Aims are too broad to allow governors to adequately track the impact of leaders' work.
- Some subject leaders are new to post and require further training and support to lead their respective areas effectively.
- Sixth-form provision is improving but the overall quality of teaching is not securing good progress.
- Governors have not adequately held leaders to account over time. The work of new governors is having a more positive impact.
- Senior leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have wasted no time in addressing key issues. They have the capability and skill to secure further improvements. The school is on a journey of change and improvement.
- Priory Group leaders are receptive and have skilled advisers. A package of support and more rigorous governance is in place to secure better outcomes.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptional. Staff are passionate about what they do. Pupils are well cared for. There is a strong feeling of inclusion within the school.
- Pupils' personal development and behaviour are good. However, there is scope to further enhance the analysis of attendance and physical intervention.

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 leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - school development plans clearly set out leaders' actions and the work undertaken improves teaching, learning, leadership and the school's overall effectiveness
 - subject leaders are provided with high-quality training and support, in their respective areas of responsibility, to improve their effectiveness
 - the newly formed governing body continues to hold leaders to account for school outcomes and maintains a rigorous level of challenge and support to improve the quality of education provided.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby outcomes, by making sure that:
 - teachers have more opportunities to share effective practice to improve their teaching skills and moderate the judgements that they make about pupils' attainment and achievement so that they are more secure
 - lesson objectives are always clear and set out the exact knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils must learn
 - activities are challenging in order that pupils can move on in their learning when they are ready
 - teachers and leaders jointly analyse assessment information with greater frequency to pinpoint what is working well and what must be improved, to inform intervention.
- Further improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the analysis of attendance information for different ages and groups of pupils
 - improving the analysis of physical intervention incidents.
- Improve sixth-form provision by ensuring that:
 - the destinations of school leavers are tracked more rigorously
 - teachers learn from sharing the best practice across the school, thereby developing the precision of their planning and the level of challenge they offer students.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Rugeley School has undergone a significant amount of change at different levels over the last year. The school has established a new leadership team and new governing body. The school now has the foundations to address the main areas for development that are currently hindering the school's progress to being good. Some key changes and strategies for improvement are relatively new; therefore, more time is required to embed work further and to monitor the impact of the changes made.
- The school development plan lacks rigour. The aims set out by leaders are too broad. As a result, governors are not able to adequately monitor the full impact of leaders' actions. Similarly, the school's self-evaluation document does not sufficiently recognise some of the key issues that the school is tackling. In some cases, leaders' and governors' evaluations are too generous and do not take enough account of the first-hand evidence available. For example, leaders and governors state that teaching and learning are good and yet the outcomes in pupils' books, and available assessment information, do not fully support this judgement.
- Leaders and governors have begun to develop a strategic vision for the school, but there is more work to be done. Though key issues are broadly being addressed, the systems and procedures for training staff and improving outcomes lack clarity.
- As with whole-school plans, subject leaders have produced plans that are too broad. Subject leaders' plans do not deal with important weaknesses in teaching, leadership or the curriculum. This is because many leaders are new to post. They have not yet had the training and support required to be more effective in their work.
- Though more work is required to secure good teaching and thereby better outcomes, leaders do not shy away from the task in hand. Leaders have drive and ambition. Improvement planning requires further development but work undertaken so far is securing improvements in provision.
- Leaders have conducted audits to check compliance with the independent school standards. These checks have been effective and have ensured that the school meets government requirements. Though the standards are met, the school is not providing a good education at present.
- The curriculum is well organised but will require further adaptation as assessment systems evolve. Leaders are establishing a better balance between subject-specific learning and developing the needs of the whole child. Plans and schemes of work take account of pupils' individual needs. Leaders have made significant changes to assessment to better monitor outcomes for pupils. Extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes provide pupils with a range of exciting experiences and activities. These activities promote the development of social, emotional and physical skills.
- The vast majority of parents and staff are very proud of the school. Leaders have strong relationships with stakeholders and have created a positive learning culture. The attitude, work ethos and resilience of staff are impressive. They are suitably focused on pupils' welfare and delight in the progress that is made lesson to lesson.
- Any additional funding secured by the school is used effectively to tackle any barriers to

learning that pupils might have. The school is able to evidence how investment in different resources, including computers, is enhancing the experience of pupils and supporting communication. Those who are looked after have appropriate personal education plans that are regularly reviewed and include specific targets to help break down barriers to learning.

- Leaders have devised schemes of work to suitably promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have individual files that evidence how they learn to cooperate with one another, experience different faiths and make choices. For example, files demonstrate how pupils share their own culture by wearing traditional dress and exploring different foods. British values are also promoted through such work. Rugeley is an inclusive organisation where staff and pupils enjoy high levels of respect.
- Performance management systems are robust. Teachers meet regularly with leaders to check their performance against the government's teachers' standards. Leaders can evidence how their support and challenge are improving practice. However, opportunities for teachers to share what they know works best are limited. As a result, the overall quality of teaching is inconsistent.

Governance

- A new governing body was established in April 2017. Prior to the formation of this new group, governance did not adequately monitor the impact of leaders' work or offer sufficient challenge. The new governing body:
 - has reviewed how meetings are conducted with leaders and has established clear procedures to offer the necessary challenge and support to drive improvement
 - accurately identifies aspects of the school's work that must be improved and where greater rigour is required to move things forward
 - has set out clearer leadership expectations and made explicit the levels of support that will be provided to quicken the rate of improvement
 - is receptive to feedback, proud of the school's work and anxious to secure further improvements
 - must maintain the rigour of monitoring and support so that key developments are sustained.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website. It takes account of national guidance and is fit for purpose. The policy is implemented effectively. The school engages well with parents and other agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm. Parents and other agencies commend the work of the school, and its strong communication with them, to ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded.
- All of the required recruitment and staff vetting checks have been carried out on staff and others to confirm their suitability to work unsupervised with pupils.
- Staff know exactly what to do if they have a safeguarding concern and know the route to follow when contacting outside agencies. Effective child protection training has equipped staff with the necessary skills to identify the different kinds of abuse, how and when to

report concerns, and what to do if they are not satisfied with the outcome of a referral.

- Staff understand pupils' social and emotional needs exceptionally well. Care and behaviour plans set out in detail how staff will support pupils to learn and help them to communicate. These plans are regularly reviewed so that support and guidance are well targeted. Careful consideration is given to the strategies used by staff to de-escalate any anxieties that pupils may have.
- Any pupil behaviour that requires additional support from adults is well recorded. Where staff use physical intervention to support a pupil to ensure that they are safe, this is recorded, the incident fully explored, and any additional support established.
- The school makes use of additional spaces and smaller break-off rooms to support pupils. Pupils are free to move in and out of these areas if they wish to.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable. Teachers and support staff exhibit a range of strengths but there are limited opportunities to share best practice, which hinders their growth. There are inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' planning, and information gained from assessment is not always used effectively to ensure that work is challenging and matched to pupils' specific needs. Consequently, pupils' books, and the school's assessment information, do not yet fully evidence the progress that pupils are capable of. These shortcomings have been acknowledged by advisers and leaders but have not been fully addressed until very recently.
- In the past, assessment systems have not resulted in reliable information about pupils' performance. Assessment information has not informed lesson-planning sufficiently well. The way teachers monitor pupils' progress has been too broad and has not taken sufficient account of benchmarking personal development. In the last academic year, leaders overhauled assessment systems and now have a better foundation to work from. The positive early impact of these changes is being realised but needs further embedding.
- Information about pupils' achievement has not been analysed with sufficient frequency. As a result, leaders have not been quick enough to respond to any trends in achievement or to address gaps in learning. Though some moderation has taken place, this has also not been frequent enough. There are therefore some issues with the reliability and validity of assessment information. These shortcomings have been addressed by the new leadership team, and procedures are improving. Teachers are now reviewing pupils' performance with more effective tools and are meeting as a team to review the judgements that they make.
- Teachers' planning is taking greater account of pupils' needs. However, planning does not adequately take account of what is happening day to day in class. Schemes of work span several weeks and do not routinely offer the further level of challenge that some pupils are ready for.
- The way staff present learning to pupils in the form of 'learning objectives' is developing. Where teaching is most effective, objectives are precise and communicate the exact knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils must learn. These strengths are not consistent across the school.
- Staff have considerable experience in supporting pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

Staff use a range of signs and symbols effectively to support and develop pupils' communication. Visual timetables are used well to help pupils navigate the school day. Some pupils are able to manage timetables independently.

- The relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils benefit greatly from the close care and attention offered. Levels of engagement across the school are strong. Pupils experience an interesting and practical curriculum. During the inspection, pupils were observed cooking, writing, exploring, reading and developing personally.
- Teachers invest time in capturing learning through a new assessment system. This includes taking photos during lessons, making notes about pupils' responses to different activities, and considering the next steps that pupils should take in their learning. These new records are beginning to provide a better evidence base of the progress that pupils are now making across the curriculum.
- Teachers' questioning is effective. Staff have a strong understanding of how and why pupils respond to different situations. They use this knowledge to help pupils manage times of transition and change. As a result of this effective work, many pupils who previously refused to attend their last school, or who have been away from education for some time, are now engaged, settled and ready to learn. The school can point to many striking examples of integrating pupils back into learning.
- Parents are provided with regular updates about school life. The school's annual reports are a particular strength of practice. These reports offer a visual diary of pupils' experiences across the curriculum. They are highly personalised and take account of the steps that pupils make in different subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils demonstrate considerable confidence. This is as a result of exemplary relationships with staff. Staff have a good understanding of the personal, social and emotional needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. They delight in the personal and behavioural improvements that pupils secure over time.
- Physical exercise is a cornerstone of the school's curriculum. When pupils arrive in the morning, and throughout the day, they participate in jogging with staff around the school site. Pupils engage well with this. At lunchtimes pupils also access a range of activities to support their social, emotional and physical development. Skating is a highlight of lunchtime routine. Many pupils demonstrate considerable dexterity and independence as they rollerblade and roller skate around the hall. Some pupils are highly skilled at this sport and are also able to control balls with hockey sticks as they move around.
- The school's nurse, occupational therapist and speech and language team are on hand to support pupils throughout the day. Like the teaching team, this group of professionals knows pupils very well and supports their welfare effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Some pupils arrive at Rugeley having had challenging experiences in other settings. Staff are focused on improving the behaviour of every child. They unpick any barriers to learning and work with families to turn around difficult situations. The school has considerable success in this field. There were no exclusions in the last academic year. Pupils' behaviour improves because the methods used to improve challenging behaviour are effective and staff offer good care.
- Some pupils arrive in school with very low attendance. A high proportion of pupils have spent long periods not in education. Once settled in school, attendance quickly improves. Overall attendance is strong. Last year, attendance was 93%. Pupils miss very few days at school. Pupils say how much they enjoy school and its facilities and that they feel safe.
- Though attendance is monitored on an individual basis, the frequency with which leaders check on any trends for different key stages or age groups requires development.
- When it is necessary for staff to physically restrain pupils to stay safe, these incidents are recorded in detail and analysed by those involved to see if any lessons can be learned. Leaders also analyse the frequency of all incidents of poor behaviour and produce individual pupil reports. These reports set out any necessary changes to support and whole-school actions. However, the school's work would be enhanced by conducting a separate and wider analysis of physical intervention. This will allow leaders and governors to more fully scrutinise any trends or patterns in behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Attainment is generally low at Rugeley School due to the complexity of pupils' needs. Pupils' progress, including that of those eligible for pupil premium funding, is not consistently good. While leaders can point to some strong examples of how pupils progress in different ways, this has not been evidenced well in the past. The descriptors used to judge the progress that pupils make have been too broad and have not taken sufficient account of the whole child, particularly their personal and academic development. More recent work is addressing this issue but is not embedded.
- The judgements that staff make about pupils' achievement have not been adequately moderated within the school or with other settings. As a result, attainment and achievement judgements are not secure. Best practice in this area is not routinely shared.
- Outcomes across different subject areas are also variable. Some subject leaders are new to post and require further support in developing their action plans and prioritising their work to raise standards further.
- The school's new assessment system is now providing the foundations for a clearer representation of pupils' achievement. In devising and designing the new system, leaders have taken greater account of the development of the whole child. Leaders are using information and findings from national research to inform their work. Portfolios of pupils' achievements are already beginning to evidence more clearly the steps that pupils are taking both in subject- and non-subject-specific learning. This will allow leaders to more fully hold teachers to account for the impact they have on learning.

- Reviews of education, health and care plans, individual education plans, and other mediums of support are frequent and detailed. These documents demonstrate how pupils are progressing towards agreed targets.
- Pupils are supported well by staff to deal with times of change and transition. Transition from other settings is particularly effective. The progress that pupils make when they first join the school is marked. As a result of strong support, the school can evidence several successful examples of pupils improving their behaviour and engagement when they start at Rugeley.

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning and resulting outcomes are not yet good in the sixth form.
- As across the whole school, assessment has not been rigorous enough in the past. Teachers have not used assessment information well enough to inform planning to move learning on rapidly. While some planning is strong, there is more to do in ensuring that learning objectives are precise and work is matched to pupils' capabilities. There is scope for some teaching to offer even more challenge.
- In the past, the curriculum has not taken sufficient account of developing future life and work-place skills. This aspect of the school's work now has a renewed focus. Students take part in 'hobbies and interest' classes so that they can gain the confidence to make choices and improve their independence.
- Work to track the destinations of students requires more rigour so that leaders can monitor the school's impact over time. Students are successfully transferring to other training facilities or settings but leaders have not routinely revisited destinations to check on how well students sustain their skills. These visits have now started to take place and leaders have produced documents that evidence the next stages of students' lives.
- Staff provide impartial and useful careers guidance and advice and offer students the opportunity to have real-life experiences. These include working within organisations that recycle bicycles and experiencing the skills required within the construction industry.
- The sixth-form leader has developed provision over time and has a clear handle on key areas for improvement. His action plans set out how weaknesses will be addressed. However, the milestones to measure progress, and the resources required to implement actions, are not clear enough.
- Relationships between staff and students are very strong in the sixth form. Students engage well with the curriculum, cooperate with one another and learn valuable social skills.

School details

Unique reference number	132735
DfE registration number	860/6024
Inspection number	10040663

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 special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory Education Services Limited
Chair	Simon Coles
Headteacher	Lisa Price
Annual fees (day pupils)	£90,000
Telephone number	01889 504400
Website	www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk
Email address	rugeleyschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	17–19 November 2015

Information about this school

- The school's leadership team has been restructured since the last inspection. A new headteacher and two new assistant headteachers were appointed in April 2017. All of these leaders were already working at the school.
- A new governing body was established in April 2017. It consists of three advisers from the Priory Group, including the operations director.

- This is the first standard inspection since the school was last inspected in November 2015.
- Rugeley is a special school for pupils aged five to 19 years. There are 47 pupils on roll. Fourteen pupils are in the sixth form. All pupils have a statement of special educational need or an education, health and care plan.
- The school admits pupils who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder or associated conditions. Pupils have complex learning needs and some display challenging behaviours.
- Just under half of the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. A small number of pupils are looked after.
- The school does not use alternative provision. However, some sixth formers attend other settings and work places to gain experiences for transition at the end of the education in school.

Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to consider, as part of this standard inspection, the arrangements made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, and whether such arrangements have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- The inspector met with senior leaders and advisers from the Priory Group to evaluate the quality of the school's self-evaluation and development plans.
- The inspector conducted observations in almost all classes. Observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Following visits to classrooms, leaders discussed findings with the inspector. A book scrutiny was also undertaken with leaders to ascertain the progress that pupils make over time.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of school documents to check compliance with the independent school standards. Documentation included: curriculum plans and schemes of work; the school's vision and values; information relating to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the promotion of British values.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of school policies, procedures and other first-hand evidence to check the effectiveness of welfare, health and safety arrangements, including robustness of safeguarding procedures.
- A meeting was held with a group of staff to ascertain their understanding of safeguarding and views about the support provided by leaders. The inspector met with two of the school's speech and language therapists and an occupational therapist. The inspector held meetings with the following advisers and managers from the Priory Group: the managing director for services in the north, the director of quality, the operations director and the quality improvement lead.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's website and internal policies to check compliance against the provision of information. The complaints policy was also reviewed as part of this process.
- There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View for the inspector to gain an understanding of parents' views. Therefore, the inspector spoke to parents by telephone and reviewed 11 parental comments from Ofsted's free-text service. Discussions were held with taxi drivers and escorts at the start of the school day. The inspector spoke to a social worker to discuss how the school manages referrals and meetings about pupils' safety.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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