

RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning

Wheelwright Lane, Coventry, West Midlands CV7 9RA

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Safeguarding is ineffective. The proprietor and governors have not ensured that systems are coordinated and cohesive, accessible and robust.
- Safeguarding leaders do not have sufficient oversight of concerns or risks so are unable to follow these up in a timely way.
- There are no records of involvement with external safeguarding agencies when concerns about pupils and staff are expressed.
- The instability in leadership means that capacity for further improvements is limited.
- Leaders' and governors' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is overgenerous.
- Until very recently, the school has worked in isolation. Governors have been slow to engage any external scrutiny or support.
- Leaders recognise that the school's system for managing staff performance is not rigorous.
- Staff do not always follow pupils' behaviour plans consistently. Sometimes, other pupils' learning is disrupted.
- Staff are not yet trained sufficiently well in how to support the learning of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The quality of teaching is variable. Activities can be slow to start, and are not planned consistently well to meet pupils' needs.
- Teaching assistants' support for learning is not matched well enough to pupils' needs.
- Historically, pupils' progress targets have not been challenging enough. Progress across all subjects is not yet consistently good.
- Home-school links are not yet strong enough to enable a consistent approach to pupils' learning.
- Leadership of 16 to 19 study programmes is weak and is not focused well enough on student outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- The strong relationships that exist between staff and pupils are evident across the school.
- Staff and governors are confident in the acting headteacher's ability to bring about improvements to the school.
- Staff receive comprehensive training to support pupils' care, health and therapeutic needs.
- The additional support pupils receive from other agencies is having a positive impact on the development of their communication skills.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, improve safeguarding and ensure that:
 - all concerns have been followed up with rigour and no pupils remain at risk from harm
 - coherent systems are in place which enable safeguarding leaders to have a comprehensive oversight of all aspects of safeguarding in the school
 - leaders keep accessible, detailed and accurate records of safeguarding concerns
 - concerns about members of staff are managed and recorded accurately, and external agencies are notified appropriately
 - concerns reported by staff are sufficiently detailed and are dealt with in a timely way.
- The proprietor and governors should take urgent action to improve the capacity of leadership and management by:
 - recruiting a substantive leadership team, including for the 16 to 19 programmes of study so that leaders are able to work more strategically and plan for the future
 - providing greater challenge and support to leaders, ensuring that pupils are set challenging targets that enable them to make good or better progress.
- Improve leadership and management of the school by:
 - developing a more accurate self-evaluation of the school which is closely matched to improvement priorities
 - developing more rigorous processes for managing staff performance
 - further developing links between home and school so that there is a consistent approach to pupils' learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - all staff receive training in the education of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties so that pupils' learning needs can be met more effectively
 - the new assessment system is embedded and used to plan lessons that are well-suited to pupils' needs, with targets that are appropriately challenging
 - pupils make accelerated progress in mathematics and science so that it matches that seen in English.
- Improve behaviour and pupils' personal development by ensuring that:
 - leaders adopt a more rigorous approach to the analysis of behaviours and use this

information to inform practice

- behaviour plans are developed collaboratively and updated regularly, and are followed consistently by all staff
- the use of physical interventions is recorded in a detailed and accurate way so that records cannot be open to misuse, and their use is monitored closely by leaders.

An external review of governance, with a specific focus on safeguarding, should be undertaken to establish how this area of leadership and management can be strengthened.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Safeguarding is ineffective. The lack of a coherent system for recording and monitoring safeguarding concerns means that leaders do not have a clear oversight of all aspects of safeguarding. As a result, they are unable to check that appropriate actions have been taken, or that concerns have been followed up with any rigour.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased since the last inspection and new staff have joined the school. While teachers are supported to gain a qualification as a teacher of the visually impaired, leaders and governors have not ensured that all staff have been trained to meet the educational needs of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. As a result, staff do not yet have sufficient skills to support these pupils well enough.
- Currently, there is a lack of capacity in the leadership team. While the acting headteacher brings some continuity to the position, having previously been the deputy headteacher at the school, other leaders have been appointed recently and are in temporary positions. This information was not shared with inspectors and did not come to light until the end of the inspection. Leaders are unclear about the status of their current roles.
- Leaders and governors do not have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As a result, their evaluation of the school is overgenerous.
- Leaders have only recently begun to build relationships with other schools, as a way of seeking external support and challenge. As a result, the impact of this work is limited.
- Arrangements for managing staff performance are not yet robust enough. The acting headteacher recognises this and has taken steps to introduce a new, improved system. It is too early to see the impact of this change.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new assessment system to track pupils' progress, as they felt the previous one was not suitable. Staff are now becoming more familiar with its use, but the new system is not yet embedded.
- The acting headteacher recognises that in the past there has been an unrealistic view of what good and outstanding progress looks like. As a result, assessment information shows that pupils have not been set targets that are suitably challenging. Staff have few opportunities to work with other colleagues in school to check that their judgements about pupils' achievements are accurate. Staff do not yet work with other schools to agree judgements about pupils' achievements.
- While the school's curriculum policy states that termly pupil progress meetings take place, leaders confirmed that these have not yet begun. Leaders were unable to provide any information about pupils' therapeutic progress, as this is also a new initiative.
- The curriculum is generally broad and balanced and enables pupils to take part in learning activities linked to different subjects, including visits to the local area such as the Ricoh Arena, shops and a farm. Adaptations are made to enable pupils to access

the curriculum in a way that is mostly appropriate to their needs.

- Leaders aim to promote fundamental British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum through activities that are accessible to pupils with complex needs. However, leaders recognise that pupils do not yet have enough opportunities through the curriculum, and socially, to develop their tolerance of each other. Pupils regularly work with staff in isolation and this limits pupils' opportunities to develop meaningful interactions with each other.
- Leaders have recently begun taking steps to improve the links between home and school, so that there is a greater consistency of approach to pupils' learning. This work is not yet embedded.
- Staff value the professional development opportunities they have been provided with in recent months. The training on sensory processing, dysphagia, managing head injuries and first aid, for example, enables them to support pupils with their care and therapeutic needs.
- Staff and governors say that they have confidence in the acting headteacher's ability to bring about the necessary improvements to the school.
- It is strongly recommended that newly qualified teachers are not appointed.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not made sure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors have not sought suitable external advice and challenge, either for leaders or for themselves.
- Governors have not ensured that they have challenged and supported leaders well enough. Governors' minutes show that they check compliance with policies and procedures, but are not provided with sufficient information about the progress pupils make in different groups and subjects.
- Governors are supportive of the acting headteacher and say that she has brought more rigour to the role. Governors say that they are committed to providing the best education and care for the pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders do not have sufficient information about safeguarding because the systems in place are not cohesive or accessible. There are several different ways in which concerns are recorded and reported and this does not enable safeguarding leaders to identify any patterns of concern, or follow these up with any rigour. Inspection evidence confirmed that some safeguarding concerns had not been recorded accurately, or followed up robustly.
- The designated safeguarding lead was unaware of previous safeguarding concerns relating to members of staff, as this information had not been made available to her prior to the inspection. Leaders were unable to provide evidence that all concerns had been followed up in an appropriate way.

- Leaders were unable to provide any evidence that they seek further advice from external safeguarding agencies or the local authority's designated officer for safeguarding.
- Additional, more detailed, information about a number of safeguarding concerns and incidents was requested during the inspection. Leaders were unable to provide all of the evidence requested.
- The current system of the recording of physical interventions is open to misuse. Too many staff are concerned with processing reports rather than analysing any patterns in the use of physical intervention. Leaders do not scrutinise records of interventions quickly enough, nor with any rigour.
- Records show that there have been a high number of incidents and accidents involving pupils in the last year. This has increased from the number seen in 2015/16. Inspectors saw evidence that actions taken following an incident are not consistently robust. When incidents are reviewed, leaders do not take sufficient actions to make sure that the risk is reduced.
- In general, staff support pupils to manage their behaviour well, in class and around the building. However, on some occasions, staff do not follow behaviour plans consistently. Some plans are not reviewed regularly, and staff do not always have the most recently reviewed version of the pupils' plan on file. When a behaviour plan requires a change in content, this process takes far too long to complete.
- Leaders do not ensure that the school policy for the use of 'safe spaces' in the classroom is followed. Records are incomplete and show occasions where a pupil's exit from a safe space has been restricted by a member of staff.
- A number of staff have completed training in safer recruitment. Appropriate checks are carried out and recorded before staff are appointed to their roles.
- All staff receive regular training in safeguarding and know to whom they should report any concerns. The school's internet controls ensure that staff and pupils cannot access inappropriate materials on the internet.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable across the school. Too often, activities are not matched to pupils' learning needs and staff are not clear about the learning outcomes for the pupils. As a result, learning is slowed.
- Sometimes, the contexts for learning do not provide an appropriate experience for pupils. For example, in one lesson, the pupils were told that they were going to learn about the Arctic, and how cold it was there. Pupils remained in a warm classroom for the activity and did not experience any changes in temperature.
- On occasions, teaching assistants are too quick to help a pupil with their learning and do not allow them time to process what they have to do. As a result, little learning takes place. Conversely, when teaching assistants are unclear of the expected outcomes, they are unable to support pupils beyond a caring role.
- Pupils are able to access their learning quickly when sufficient resources are provided for them. This is not always the case; learning time is wasted for some groups when a

single resource has to be shared between all the pupils. Time for learning is also wasted when lessons are slow to start.

- Pupils are not consistently provided with additional resources to help them understand the sequence of events; for example, a class of pupils have to share a 'now and next' board.
- Inspectors saw limited evidence of the 'total communication' approach which leaders describe as 'integral' to teaching and learning. Objects of reference were not used consistently during the school day.
- Teachers are not using assessment information consistently to help them plan learning activities suited to the pupils' abilities. When assessment information is used well, pupils engage in their learning more effectively.
- Where teaching is strong, pupils are supported well in their learning because activities are well matched to their needs and abilities.
- Where activities are modelled well, pupils are able to take part in activities with meaning. Inspectors observed pupils enjoying a music lesson, exploring a variety of instruments, and responding to changes in pieces of music through different facial expressions. Inspectors saw pupils engaged with a purpose in the setting up of the 'Tasty Treats' café, counting how many tables there were, and how many sugar bowls were needed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. The high number of incidents and accidents involving pupils have risen this year and are not addressed with enough rigour. As a result, risks are not reduced suitably for these vulnerable pupils. Leaders' lack of access to the recording systems has contributed to this poor oversight.
- Staff make sure that those pupils who need additional support for their medical needs and personal care during the school day receive this in a discreet and dignified way.
- The additional therapeutic support that pupils receive for their needs is a strength of the school.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. Staff take the time to make sure that they know individual pupils well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In some lessons, pupils' behaviour is managed well by staff so that it does not impact on the learning of others. In other lessons, pupils' behaviour can be disruptive and limits other pupils' learning opportunities.
- In 2016, pupils' attendance was below the national average. Currently, pupils' attendance overall is in line with the national average. Leaders do not analyse

attendance of different groups of pupils accurately.

- Leaders say that there are no incidents of bullying in the school. Inspectors saw no evidence of bullying during the inspection, and staff and parents did not raise any concerns about bullying. The school's bullying policy does not take into account the different types of bullying that may occur.
- Pupils who have very challenging behaviours are being supported to develop their resilience well, and manage their behaviour more effectively.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Leaders recognise that in the past, their expectations of the progress pupils can make have not been sufficiently challenging. Leaders have held an unrealistic view of what good and outstanding progress looks like and as a result pupils have been set targets that are not challenging enough.
- Across all year groups, pupils make weak progress in science. Progress is better in mathematics but is strongest in English. Leaders believe that this is due to the additional support pupils receive from other agencies, such as the speech and language therapy team.
- Leaders have introduced a new system for assessment which they believe is more suited to measuring pupils' progress across a range of subjects. Current information about pupils' progress is not analysed by key stage or group.
- The school's transition officer works with leaders, therapeutic services and parents to secure appropriate destinations for the pupils after they leave the centre, but does not yet support transition arrangements through the annual review process from Year 9. As a result, planning for transition does not start early enough.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- The provision for students in the sixth form is inadequate because safeguarding is not effective.
- Leadership of this provision is weak. The acting headteacher held responsibility for this area in her previous role, and a new leader has not yet been identified.
- Teachers' planning is not focused well enough on students' outcomes. As a result, staff are not consistently clear about what students are expected to be able to learn.
- Students have limited opportunities to develop their skills in different contexts. Most of their learning takes place in the classroom, being supported on a one-to-one basis. Inspectors saw students who were learning about different activities relating to employment, but were unable to practise these in the right environment. For example, students were trying to sweep up leaves in the classroom, rather than on the leaf-covered outside area.
- Leaders are not yet able to see whether interventions are making a difference to students' progress and development in the sixth form.
- Since September 2016, students have been provided with a range of accredited

courses appropriate to their needs, enabling them to achieve externally accredited awards. There is now a greater focus on developing students' independence and preparing them for their transition to their next destination.

School details

Unique reference number	122155
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	10002633

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	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of students	4 to 19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	31
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	6
Appropriate authority	The proprietor
Chair	Carl Underhill
Acting headteacher	Angela Farrell
Telephone number	0247 636 9500
Website	www.rnib.org.uk/pearscentre
Email address	pearscentre@rnib.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school is a non-maintained special school for pupils with severe visual impairments and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan, and are placed at the school with the agreement and funding of their local authority.
- The acting headteacher took up her post in April 2017. The other members of the senior leadership team are also in an acting capacity.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about PE and

sports premium funding on its website.

- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average.
- The school does not receive any pupil premium funding.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The school currently serves pupils' needs from 23 different local authorities.
- The school liaises with the neighbouring Exhall Grange School to provide activities for most-able pupils from RNIB Pears Centre.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all year groups. They were accompanied by senior leaders for some of these observations.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher and other members of staff to discuss different aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector met with the UK specialist lead for the RNIB. She also talked to two members of the governing body by telephone and met with another governing body member.
- Inspectors met with a group of staff and talked to staff informally.
- Inspectors were not able to consider the views of parents on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as there were too few responses. They took into account the free-text responses, the school's own parent survey and talked to a parent via telephone.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information on the school's website, progress information, policies, minutes of the governing body, behaviour records, safeguarding records and attendance information.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jane Edgerton	Ofsted Inspector
John Craig	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged students' refers to those students who attract government pupil premium funding: students claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and students in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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