

Ratcliffe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113656
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	378737
Inspection dates	22–23 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of social care was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	8–17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Bruton
Headteacher	Cherie White
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2009
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Boarding provision	Ratcliffe School
Social care Unique Reference Number	003895
Social care inspector	Christina Maddison

Age group	8–17
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, one additional inspector and a social care inspector. Inspectors visited 13 lessons taught by 13 teachers, and held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence including data on pupils' progress, pupils' work, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, school improvement plans and minutes of meetings. They also attended an assembly, visited an off-site centre where pupils learn vocational skills and observed evening activities in the residential provision. The responses, in questionnaires, of 20 parents and carers, 33 pupils and 45 staff, were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well the school has adapted to meet the needs of pupils who have complex communication and social difficulties.
- How effectively links between residential care and education support the curriculum and promote pupils' personal development.
- The strength of leadership at all levels in securing the school's continued improvement.

Information about the school

Ratcliffe School provides education for pupils whom it describes as having communication, interaction and social development needs. It also provides specialist provision for pupils with an autistic spectrum condition. Since the last inspection, the school has admitted a greater number of pupils who have complex communication and social difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and a large majority are boys. Just over half the pupils use the school's flexible boarding provision. Almost all are of White British heritage and speak English as their home language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. A much higher than average proportion of pupils join the school at times other than at the start of the academic year.

The school has gained several awards in recognition of its work, including Healthy Schools Plus, Activemark, Sportsmark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Eco Award and the Autism and Inclusion Award at enhanced level.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ratcliffe School is a good school. The good boarding provision contributes significantly to the outstanding curriculum, which includes a very broad range of academic and vocational courses, and to pupils' personal development. Outstanding links with the local community and with parents and carers underpin its success in re-engaging pupils with learning who have often failed to thrive in previous schools. In the words of one parent, 'Ratcliffe School has proved to be an extremely positive experience for our child. We have only praise for the staff and environment.' The outstanding quality of safeguarding, and of care, guidance and support, is underpinned by the very positive and respectful relationships displayed towards pupils by staff across the school. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and, in relation to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, develop an outstanding understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle.

The school is adapting well to meeting the needs of pupils with complex communication and social difficulties. Staff have benefited from appropriate training in understanding the needs of pupils with an autistic spectrum condition and in managing pupils who exhibit anxious and challenging behaviour. Good plans are in place to extend the use of pictures and symbols and to update the policies on communication and literacy. Senior leaders recognise further work is needed to ensure these approaches are adopted fully across the school.

Good teaching ensures pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils leave school having gained several qualifications and all leavers move on to a suitable destination. Good arrangements for assessing pupils' progress and marking their work are evident in several lessons. However, there is inconsistency between subjects in the use of marking and assessment information to help pupils understand how to improve their learning. In lessons and in the boarding provision, opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to take responsibility for their learning, which limits the development of their independence.

The headteacher, supported by an experienced team of senior leaders, provides a clear vision and strong leadership for the school. Senior leaders have good arrangements for reviewing and evaluating the school's performance and have an accurate picture of strengths and areas for further development. The roles and responsibilities of some middle leaders lack clarity, which limits the use of their expertise in helping to monitor the school's work and plan for its improvement. Significant improvements since the last inspection, especially in the curriculum and in

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the quality of care, guidance and support, demonstrate that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend opportunities for pupils to develop their independence by allowing them to take more responsibility for their learning, both in lessons and in the boarding provision.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring there is greater consistency in the use of marking and assessment information to give pupils a better understanding of the next steps in their learning.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders so that they are involved more effectively in monitoring the school's work and in planning for its improvement.
- Complete the review of communication and literacy policies to ensure that approaches to meet the needs of pupils with complex communication difficulties are adopted fully across the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The achievement and enjoyment of all groups of pupils are good. Pupils join the school with levels of attainment that are low, due to their communication and social difficulties. All leave school having obtained passes in a wide range of subjects at GCSE and Entry level, with some gaining additional vocational qualifications and a few gaining higher grade GCSE passes. This represents good progress in relation to pupils' starting points. Learning in the classroom is good because there are many opportunities to learn in a practical way, for example, when pupils conduct science experiments to test chemical reactions, use games to reinforce learning in mathematics, or grow vegetables as part of the horticulture course. Pupils learn to discuss their feelings and emotions with others in the class, for example in personal, social and health education. However, opportunities to extend their learning through group discussion and working collaboratively are generally underdeveloped.

Pupils behave well and are pleased to talk about their achievements at the school. Their self-esteem is raised and their successes recognised through, for example, assemblies and 'pupils of the week' awards. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and to the wider community, for example through the school council and by raising funds for charities such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institute and Shelterbox. Pupils' success in gaining academic qualifications, their participation in work experience placements and vocational courses, and their knowledge of information and communication technology prepares them well for their future economic well-being. Pupils' understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle is reinforced extremely well by the high participation in sporting activities, topics in the personal, social and health education curriculum and the provision of healthy food. The school has received several awards in recognition of its outstanding work with pupils in this area.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations and good knowledge of the subjects they teach, which drive the consistent focus on academic learning in lessons. The pace of learning is brisk and lessons typically contain a good variety of activities which help to capture pupils' interests. Teachers and teaching assistants draw attention to pupils' successes and praise them for their effort and achievement. Occasionally, questions are rather brief and do not encourage pupils to provide extended responses or to develop sufficiently their own ideas. Good relations between staff and pupils underpin the positive climate for learning. However, in a small but significant number of lessons, pupils receive adult help when they are capable of completing tasks independently. The assessment of pupils' progress is completed each term and the information is used to set targets for improvement. Most pupils are aware of the level at which they are working and of their target grades. However, in a few subjects, marking is too brief and assessment information is not used effectively to help pupils improve their work.

The school is very effective in harnessing the subject knowledge of individual staff and the expertise of partners in the community to provide a rich curriculum tailored to pupils' individual needs. Several vocational courses are provided through collaboration with other schools at a local skills centre and include hair and beauty, horticulture, construction, catering and public services. Clear pathways are set out to guide pupils in their choice of optional courses at the end of Key Stage 3. A popular

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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and extensive range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits, greatly enhances the curriculum. These include horse riding, fishing, outdoor pursuits and a trip to France. A very small number of post-16 students have remained at school on a temporary basis while they await a suitable placement. Flexible programmes are tailored to their individual needs, which are successful in helping them continue learning. Programmes designed specifically to meet the personal needs of girls are provided in collaboration with the boarding staff.

Pupils report they feel safe and that they can talk to staff if they have any concerns. Education and boarding staff work very closely together and with a wide range of therapists and other professionals, including a speech and language therapist, the school counsellor and health service practitioners, to meet the individual needs of pupils. Staff have received appropriate training which helps them manage the few incidents of anxious or challenging behaviour calmly and sensitively. Evidence shows that over the past year the number of exclusions has fallen and exclusions are now rare. Excellent arrangements are in place for when pupils join or leave the school. The school’s parent link worker makes a visit to the home of each new pupil, which helps pupils settle in quickly and contributes significantly to the close partnership between the school and parents and carers. Parents receive regular information about their child’s progress, including through telephone, text and email. Extremely robust procedures for tracking pupils’ attendance, coupled with swift action to tackle any absence, have had a major impact on raising the level of attendance to above the national average for pupils attending special schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders are highly successful in driving improvement and in promoting a positive ethos where there is a strong emphasis on raising pupils’ achievement. The shared commitment of staff across the school ensures pupils’ experiences are consistently high in both the education and boarding provision. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and supported by the use of data to measure pupils’ performance and to check the participation of different groups. For example, the allocation of rewards is analysed to ensure all pupils receive recognition and challenging learning targets are set which use nationally expected levels of progress as a starting point. The school has good plans to promote community cohesion. Strong links with the local community are complemented by curriculum topics which cover wider cultural traditions and by pupils’ links with children in other

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countries, for example through a pen pal arrangement. The governing body gives a good level of challenge and support to the school and ensures that all statutory requirements are met. It is actively involved in the school’s improvement planning and an individual governor is linked to each residential house to provide oversight of the boarding provision. Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough and meet all the requirements.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Overall effectiveness of the boarding experience

The overall effectiveness of the school’s boarding provision is good. It has outstanding features. Management and leadership of boarding are strong, with clear aims and a commitment towards continual improvement and development of the provision. The head of care receives strong support from the headteacher and governors. The aims for the service are contained in the school development plan. This includes the total refurbishment of one of the houses. This house is closed at present during the refurbishment and staff have worked hard to ensure that this work has had minimal impact on the pupils that usually reside there and who have now been placed in other houses. The recommendation from the previous inspection has been fully met. Pupils now participate in regular fire drills and are aware of the action they need to take in the event of a fire.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of well-planned activities that take into account individual and group needs. They report that they ‘love the activities’. Activities on offer include army cadets, youth clubs, fishing trips and football. Pupils are able to choose activities and help to plan them. The school council also has input into planning activities and trips. For example, a trip to Drayton Manor Theme Park was suggested by the school council. This took place and was greatly enjoyed by the

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pupils. This ensures that the pupils feel that their opinions are taken into account and are valued.

Parents have very positive views about the quality of care at the school and say it has had a positive impact on their child's life. Residential pupils say they really enjoy boarding at the school. One pupil commented, 'Since I've been boarding at the school I have been able to deal with my problems easier and have made a lot of friends.' The residential staff have been very successful in helping pupils achieve positive outcomes, such as increased social skills and participation in a wide range of activities. Independence is promoted with the older pupils. They are helped to achieve skills such as budgeting, shopping and cooking to prepare them for when they leave the school. However, younger pupils do not have many opportunities to learn independent living skills. For example, pupils are passive when staff serve and clear away meals and drinks at lunch times and supper times. Successful and stable placements have often been achieved with pupils who have previously experienced exclusion from their previous school and residential placements. Care is highly individualised. This is essential as pupils at the school have a diverse range of social, health and communication needs.

Cultural and religious needs are met on an individual basis, and there is good promotion of different cultures. For example, pupils have pen pals in France and Germany and are encouraged to sample a range of meals from different countries.

The safety of the pupils is achieved through a range of robust safeguarding procedures and practice. The implementation of the school's procedures, in relation to safeguarding, health and safety, and staff recruitment, are particularly strong areas of practice. Parents commented that they agreed or strongly agreed that 'the school keeps my child safe'. Pupils all agreed that the staff keep them safe and they feel safe when they are boarding at the school. All knew what action to take in the event of a fire.

Staff are well trained, committed and caring. Pupils report that staff always listen to them and help them. Staff benefit from thorough supervision and a very good level of support. This ensures they are able to meet the needs of the pupils, some of whom have diverse and challenging care needs.

Behaviour is very well managed in the boarding houses. Staff receive regular training in behaviour management strategies, techniques and physical restraint. There is a robust system of rewards and sanctions in place that all pupils understand. This is effective in encouraging positive behaviour. The number of physical restraints has decreased and is only used as a very last resort to keep pupils or staff safe. Pupils report that staff speak to them after an incident of restraint to talk through the incident. However, this is not recorded in the restraint records. This omission has minimal impact on outcomes for pupils.

Pupils enjoy boarding in the warm and comfortable accommodation. They are able to personalise their bedrooms, which are for their sole use. This gives them a sense of

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ownership and belonging. The houses have a range of games and activities for the pupils to enjoy. Pupils said that the food is excellent and they really enjoy the meals. Healthy eating is encouraged, and pupils benefit from a range of healthy and nutritious meals and snacks.

The diverse health and medication needs of pupils are clearly identified and met extremely well. Medication is safely stored and there are robust procedures for its administration. This ensures the safety of the pupils. Pupils say that they are well looked after when they are ill and are able to speak with staff if they have a problem. Diverse emotional health care needs are met well at the school through the participation of a range of therapists, including occupational therapists, dental hygienists, psychologists, and counsellors. This professional contribution means that pupils receive the emotional, physical and health care support they need to achieve positive outcomes.

National Minimum Standards

All the national minimum standards are met.

These are the grades for the boarding provision

Overall effectiveness of the boarding experience	2
Outcomes for boarders	2
Quality of boarding provision and care	2
Boarders' safety	2
Leadership and management of boarding	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers hold extremely positive views about the school's work. They are particularly pleased with how well the school meets children's individual needs and keeps their children safe. Parents and carers feel the school is well led and managed and that teaching is good. A very small number expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour and the level of supervision provided. During the inspection, inspectors found pupils' behaviour good in lessons, around the school and in the boarding houses. They also found a good level of staffing, which was matched well to pupils' individual needs.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ratcliffe School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 20 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 69 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	35	10	50	2	10	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	8	40	12	60	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	11	55	8	40	1	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	50	7	35	2	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	50	10	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	8	40	9	45	2	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	35	12	60	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	11	55	8	40	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	12	60	8	40	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	55	7	35	2	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	55	9	45	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	70	6	30	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	13	65	6	30	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ratcliffe School, Dawlish, EX7 9RZ

Recently I visited your school with two other inspectors. We enjoyed our visit very much and appreciated the welcome we received. Thanks to those of you who took time to talk to us about your work and life at school. We also talked to the staff and other adults connected with the school, visited lessons and the boarding provision, looked at your work and took account of the views of your parents and carers to find out how the school is doing.

Here are the main points.

- Your school gives you a good education.
- You enjoy coming to school and behave well.
- The school helps you develop an excellent understanding of how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle.
- The school works extremely well with others in the community to make sure you get very good care, guidance and support.
- You have excellent opportunities to follow different courses and to follow your particular interests.
- The boarding provision is good and helps you to take part in a very wide range of after-school clubs and activities.
- The school has outstanding links with your parents and carers who are very pleased with how the school helps you to learn.

I have asked the school to do a few things to help it become better.

- Encourage you to do more things for yourself in lessons and in the boarding houses.
- Give you better information on how you might improve your work.
- Get some adults more involved in checking how well the school is doing.
- Look closely at how it can improve the way you to get your ideas across and improve your speaking, listening and writing skills.

You can help by offering to do more things for yourself and by talking to adults about how you might improve your work. Thank you once again for your help with the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector

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