

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



20 July 2018

Mrs Tina Lovey
Headteacher
Rivermead School
Forge Lane
Gillingham
Kent
ME7 1UG

Dear Mrs Lovey

Short inspection of Rivermead School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018 with Emma Phillips, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection of the predecessor school. You, the head of school and leaders are passionate and determined to ensure that all pupils are equipped with the skills and qualifications they need to be successful. As a leadership team, you clearly demonstrate the capacity to improve the school even further.

You and senior leaders expect your pupils to achieve good academic standards, but you also recognise the importance of developing their personal, social and independence skills. Pupils are very positive about the school. They enjoy their lessons and the many visits, including the recent residential trip to France. Parents and carers are also happy with the school. One parent said: 'Our son has grown into a confident happy young man and I strongly feel this is due to the schooling he has received at Rivermead.' In our joint lesson observations, we noticed that, where teaching is highly effective, all pupils engage in learning with enthusiasm. Where teaching is not as strong, work is not matched to pupils' abilities. Pupils' English books show the good progress they have made in developing their writing skills since September. In mathematics books, it was clear that the work does not always challenge pupils and they receive limited guidance about how to move their learning forward.

The school is part of the Rivermead Inclusive Trust, a multi-academy trust (MAT), and the MAT's local advisory board provides governance for the school. Members of the local advisory board bring valuable skills and experience to their governor roles. Governors visit regularly and know the school well. Governors and the school

improvement partner challenge the information they receive from your senior leadership team. As a result of this challenge, governors hold leaders to account effectively and set clear targets for the school's improvement. You and the school improvement partner have been working to refine the academic monitoring arrangements. You have also introduced new systems that will record information on pupils' behaviour and safeguarding needs more efficiently. Once developed, these systems will provide even greater rigour and ensure that all information can be accessed easily. In addition, they will support leaders in ensuring that pupils achieve the best outcomes, both academically and in their personal development.

At the last inspection of the predecessor school, inspectors highlighted the school's many strengths. They also recommended that the few most able pupils in key stages 4 and 5 have a range of academic qualifications to choose from. You have responded by introducing a wider selection of GCSEs at key stage 4. Pupils at key stage 5 are also able to access a comprehensive range of courses including Level 3 qualifications. Since the school opened as an academy, you have continued to make improvements. The school is expanding and, in September, is opening a much-needed provision to support pupils who have mental health needs. You have increased the capacity of your leadership team by developing middle leaders, so they can support the improvement work of the school. Additionally, you have mentored the head of school to develop her skills to lead the school effectively from September.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record details accurately the rigorous employment checks that leaders carry out when recruiting all adults in the school. Robust training enables staff to be up to date with the latest safeguarding advice and legislation. Staff know their responsibilities to safeguard pupils and report any concerns they have appropriately. The school works collaboratively with parents and other agencies to make sure that pupils receive any additional care they need to be safe. The governors make regular checks on the work of staff and leaders in keeping pupils safe. As a result, governors are confident that the school is effective and proactive in safeguarding pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe when online and in the community. They know who to speak to if they are worried. One pupil said, 'The school are really supportive if you have any concerns.'

Inspection findings

- Under your inspirational leadership, the Rivermead Inclusive Trust was established and you became the chief executive officer. You felt this collaboration was essential, as it enables all pupils in the MAT to benefit from the expertise of the staff in the schools. The MAT employs staff who work across the schools, for example the school improvement partner. The schools have joint training and the headteachers meet regularly to share good practice. It is evident that Rivermead

has not only benefited from being part of the MAT but also provides valuable support and special educational needs training to the other schools in the MAT.

- Pupils join the school with knowledge and skills well below the level typical for pupils of their age. Before they are admitted, leaders collate information from parents and professionals to ensure that everything is in place for the pupils' successful transition into the school. Leaders have developed the 'Rivermead Progress Steps' to monitor pupils' progress. This system is well established but has recently been refined to give a clearer picture of pupils' outcomes. Your leaders recognise that the system needs some fine tuning. This will give them the confidence that it provides a true reflection of the progress pupils have made. When pupils join the school, their skills and knowledge are comprehensively assessed and this detailed information is used to plan their individual learning programmes. Consequently, any gaps in their learning are addressed promptly. Pupils are given their individual annual target for each subject they study. These are challenging targets that are reviewed regularly, with more stretching targets being given if pupils meet their targets too easily. Leaders regularly track and analyse pupils' assessment information and provide appropriate interventions and support for those who are not making the expected rate of progress. Leaders monitor the impact of interventions and adjust them if they are not effective. As a result, most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good or outstanding progress.
- Leaders have created a broad and balanced curriculum which ensures that pupils are able to access the national curriculum and a range of GCSEs as well as other recognised qualifications. The curriculum is also designed to develop pupils' social, emotional and independence skills. In key stage 4, leaders have implemented a 'skills for life' programme which includes: first aid; travel training; basic food hygiene certification; financial awareness; and opportunities to go to college in preparation for pupils' key stage 5 transition. All pupils leave with qualifications that enable them to be successful in the next stage of their education or training. The school has built an excellent partnership with MidKent College, and Rivermead 16 to 19 provision is based there. In the 16 to 19 provision, pupils are able to start courses appropriate to their ability. Transition is very smooth, due to pupils having experienced college life at key stage 4. Once settled in the sixth form, most pupils successfully transfer to the college's roll to continue their education in Year 13.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, before school and during the less structured times of the day is exceptional. Routines are embedded, enabling an orderly and prompt start to lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils are good and staff's thorough knowledge of pupils ensures that lessons are calm and purposeful. Over time, the numbers of exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour have reduced substantially and are now well below the national average. Leaders are introducing a new system to analyse pupils' behaviour in fine detail. Their use of this analysis will enable them to deliver a greater range of bespoke support and interventions. There are clear structures to follow up pupils' poor attendance and these are having a positive impact. The complex mental health needs of some pupils mean there are times when illness causes absence. Leaders know pupils well and work closely with parents and other professionals to support those

pupils who are absent too often. As a result, the school's overall attendance is improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils know their next steps in mathematics and are challenged to achieve higher standards of attainment
- the systems used to record pupils' outcomes are further developed and refined to analyse pupils' progress more efficiently to better identify their next steps.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Conway

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, my colleague and I met with you, the school's leadership team, the chair of governors and the MAT's school improvement partner. We visited classes in all key stages to observe pupils learning, talk with pupils about their progress, and look at their books. All lesson observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team. We spoke to the school council. We considered the 14 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire Parent View, and one letter we received from a parent. We reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys from 76 pupils and 70 members of staff. We looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, the curriculum and assessment. We examined the school's analysis of pupils' progress and attainment, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school improvement plan.