

Inspection of Riverside Education

2 Riverside Drive, Stechford, Birmingham, West Midlands B33 9BF

Inspection dates: 26–28 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Riverside makes a real difference to pupils' lives. There is a special feel to the school due to the positive ethos and commitment of staff, led by the inspirational headteacher. Many pupils join the school having previously experienced difficulty and disruption to their education. At Riverside, pupils get the chance to turn their lives around. Everyone exemplifies and reinforces the school's values of 'honesty, integrity and respect'. Pupils' comments accurately sum up their experiences of school: 'We're 100% safe here; they [the staff] really care about us and they'll drop everything to help us.' Students in the sixth form are well supported.

Pupils' behaviour improves over time because there are clear expectations that are understood and followed by everyone. Leaders address bullying concerns quickly, and pupils agree that there is little bullying. Leaders help pupils to reflect on bullying and behaviour incidents in a safe and supportive way.

Staff have put much thought and careful planning into creating a broad, personalised curriculum with a good balance of academic and vocational qualifications, including GCSEs. Pupils and post-16 students see the value of what they are learning about. It helps them to achieve well, become independent and gain valuable skills for employment.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Making a difference for pupils and students who have experienced a turbulent education is at the heart of the proprietors' vision for the school. Their commitment and drive to further improve the school, along with high aspirations, is commendable. The vision translates into positive experiences and outcomes for pupils. All of the independent school standards continue to be met. The school has a suitable accessibility plan. Leaders want pupils to experience an interesting education, while also improving their chances of employment or access to further education. Parents and carers speak highly of the school. Typical comments included 'They will do anything for you' and 'They see their role as a vocation and not a job.'

Teachers plan and order curriculum content so that pupils learn and remember more over time. In mathematics, for example, pupils have frequent opportunities to revisit basic skills. This enables them to apply their knowledge to more complex mathematical problems. Teachers make sure that pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills across other subjects. Activities often make connections to pupils' social and emotional development. Leaders have skilfully woven British values into schemes of work.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the help they need because leaders take time to gather up-to-date information and use it effectively. Staff work well with other agencies to get pupils extra support.

Pupils' work in books shows a clear sequence of learning. Teachers formally assess

pupils' work every term. They use this information to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills and make sure that pupils receive extra help. However, while the school's policy is clear, some teachers are not consistently addressing pupils' misconceptions in lessons or following up incomplete work. As a result, a few pupils continue to repeat errors and have some gaps in their understanding.

Staff make their expectations for behaviour clear. Pupils settle quickly to their work. Staff manage low-level disruption quickly and discreetly. They know that pupils sometimes behave the way they do because of their lack of confidence in their academic ability. Staff often use humour to defuse situations that may be in danger of escalating. Sometimes, pupils choose to work away from the classroom. They are well supported and supervised.

Lunchtimes are calm; pupils are well supervised. Inspectors saw pupils engaging in good-natured conversations while playing board games with staff or eating lunch. Pupils enjoy enrichment activities such as aero-kicks, yoga and languages. A small number of pupils miss out on these activities because they are receiving additional support for English and mathematics.

Pupils' and students' personal development has a high priority in the school. Staff take time to find out about pupils' needs and interests, including how they learn best. Staff talk passionately about being positive role models for the pupils. Pupils have helped to write the personal and social education curriculum. It threads through different subjects, focusing on developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem. In music, pupils write lyrics to express themselves: 'They ask me what I think instead of telling me what to think.'

Staff get to know pupils well, supporting their social and emotional well-being. Pupils appreciate this. They talk about the 'real' care they receive rather than the 'fake' care they say that they have encountered in other settings. Weekly debates enable pupils to reflect on different aspects of their spiritual, cultural and moral development, for example debating legal and illegal employment and diversity within society.

Attendance rates are below the national average, but many pupils have had significant improvements in their attendance since joining the school. This includes some pupils who were previously out of education for some time. Staff follow up pupils' absence quickly. While there have been no permanent exclusions, the use of short, fixed-term exclusions is high.

The school's new premises mean that staff can offer pupils and sixth-form students the opportunity to follow vocational-based courses. Pupils can learn skills such as carpentry, plumbing and construction.

Leaders make sure that individual timetables incorporate pupils' and students' academic learning and vocational interests. Pupils and post-16 students receive good-quality careers advice and follow appropriate courses. There is a strong emphasis on key skills for employment, including punctuality, attendance and

customer service. Leaders have worked tirelessly to secure agreements with a wide range of employers to provide pupils and students with relevant work-based experiences. Pupils and students cover different topics in a structured way so that they can apply their knowledge in the workplace. For example, pupils learn about all aspects of health and safety practice before working in a hair salon. Leaders' commitment to helping pupils learn how to use public transport safely has led to almost all pupils now travelling independently to and from school and the workplace.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has an up-to-date safeguarding policy, published on its website. It takes account of the most recent advice issued by the government.

Leaders carry out pre-employment checks to make sure that staff are suitable to work with pupils. Staff receive comprehensive training to ensure that they know how to keep pupils safe. Training covers risks in the local community, such as child criminal and sexual exploitation. Safeguarding is covered explicitly in the curriculum. Staff use real-life examples with pupils to illustrate dangers. Inspectors saw pupils engaging in debates about knife crime after a recent incident in the local area.

Leaders complete detailed risk assessments of school-based activities. They also carry out thorough health and safety checks on potential work-experience providers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some pupils are making errors or not completing their work because they have not understood well enough what they are learning about. Some staff do not adhere consistently to the school's agreed policy and follow up these misunderstandings. They do not ensure that pupils have completed all the work they should. As a result, pupils are at risk of making repeated mistakes in their work or missing out on important knowledge. Leaders should ensure that all staff follow the school's agreed policy so that pupils do not repeat mistakes in their work. They should make sure that pupils cover all the work that they need to so that they can achieve well.
- A small number of pupils receive additional support for their basic skills at the same time as enrichment activities take place. These pupils miss out on these enrichment activities. Leaders should ensure that any additional support pupils receive does not limit their access to a range of enrichment activities.
- The use of fixed-term exclusions is too high. Some pupils are missing out on their education. Leaders should commit to reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions and continue to support pupils in managing their behaviour effectively.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	142338
DfE registration number	330/6019
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10093010
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Riverside Education Ltd
Chair	Anthony Maguire
Headteacher	Abide Zenenga
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,000 to £30,000
Telephone number	0121 678 2942
Website	www.riversideeducation.co.uk
Email address	info@riversideeducation.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–8 June 2017

Information about this school

- Following two material change inspections since the last independent standard inspection in June 2017, the school now operates across two premises and has increased its capacity to cater for up to 100 pupils. The second site, Riverside Vocational College, is based at 17 The Gardens, Erdington, Birmingham B23 6AG.
- The school does not have a governing body. A group of 'improvement partners' oversee the work of the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the director of education, the headteacher and senior leaders to discuss all aspects of the school's work. We focused on English, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and 'creative hair'. We spoke to curriculum leaders and teachers about how their subjects are planned and taught. We visited lessons, accompanied by senior leaders, looked at pupils' work and talked to pupils about what they were learning. I visited a sample of lessons in other subjects during the inspection.
- I met with one of the directors of the proprietary board and one of the school's improvement partners. I spoke to another improvement partner on the telephone.
- We considered a range of evidence relating to safeguarding, including the pre-employment checks leaders make on staff, safeguarding records and pupil files. We met with the designated safeguarding lead and one of his deputies.
- We looked at a range of evidence about the school's curriculum, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and exclusion information. We talked to pupils informally during the school day, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes. We both visited both school sites during the inspection.
- I met with a small number of parents. I considered the three free-text responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, the six responses to the pupil survey and the 27 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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