

Inspection of an outstanding school: Riverside Community Special School

Scratchface Lane, Purbrook, Waterlooville, Hampshire PO7 5QD

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Every day at school begins with a warm welcome for each pupil. They look forward to seeing the friendly adults and their planned learning activities. Parents told inspectors that they never worry about their children when they are at school. They say that the staff understand their children's needs and meet these with care.

Leaders and staff want all pupils to enjoy school and achieve their very best, no matter how complex their needs are. To make this happen, teachers work hard to adapt learning. Pupils learn how to communicate, either with Makaton signing or picture exchange. These important skills enable pupils to take an increasing interest in their world. More importantly, by communicating, pupils can develop friendships. They value their friends and are kind to each other. As a result, there is no bullying here.

Pupils' well-being is at the forefront of all that the adults do. In almost every lesson, there is an opportunity to learn outdoors and to be active. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their playtimes. Play is important to pupils throughout the school, enabling them to become more sociable. Pupils also enjoy their sensory and active lessons. However, on occasion, learning activities are not focused sharply enough.

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

The school's curriculum framework, called 'steps to learning', aims to build knowledge gradually. Teachers are experts in adapting the framework to meet pupils' individual needs. They know their pupils' abilities and have a comprehensive understanding of the learning steps. Teachers know what pupils need to be able to do next. They plan lots of repetition to help pupils remember their learning.

Children in Reception Year are quick to learn the routines of the school day. They make rapid progress in improving their attention skills. Their teacher's use of stimulating objects

encourages sitting and listening as a group. Children manage this for increasing amounts of time. Teaching them to develop their learning skills continues well into key stage 1.

The school has a large number of non-verbal pupils. They learn to communicate through well-structured methods. Leaders are determined that all pupils should read and use numbers. Teachers make some use of initial letter sounds to support reading. However, phonics sometimes gets in the way of other communication methods. Pupils learn to read by initial communication through picture exchange and whole-word recognition. They become keen readers, even when they struggle to understand the text. Children enjoy stories right from their start in Reception. They relish hearing how the wolf huffs and puffs to 'blow the house down'. In all classes, teachers tell or read stories. They even read them online so that pupils can listen at home.

Teachers know that understanding written information is an important life skill. They develop pupils' reading comprehension well. Teachers keep pupils' reading development under review. Extra support helps pupils who are not making progress through the learning steps. This support brings them back on track.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum embraces practical and sensory experiences. Changes during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions prompted smaller groups within each class. To support pupils' well-being, teachers also implemented more regular changes of activity. Each lesson has a three-part segment. This is comprised of tailored teaching time, an outdoor learning activity and independent tasks. This approach is effective, particularly when activities are linked, such as in mathematics. At times though, these within-lesson changes are not well planned or implemented.

Each subject has planning that identifies important skills, knowledge and experiences. These aim for pupils to be well prepared for the future. There are effective connections between some of these subjects, such as physical education (PE) and personal, social and health education. Teachers use PE to help pupils think about their physical and mental health. Older pupils learn to cooperate through team games, including some that are competitive. Visits beyond school add exciting opportunities that are shared with friends. A residential visit challenges the older pupils to enjoy zip-wires and paddle kayaks.

Staff model behaviour particularly well and treat pupils with respect. Pupils learn how to reflect on their good behaviour choices and to encourage others. Disruption caused by COVID-19 closures has affected a few pupils' behaviour. However, staff manage any challenges confidently. They do this with patience and understanding, using a well-planned approach and calming strategies.

Everyone enjoys working at the school. Staff say that teamwork is strong, and that they feel supported by leaders. Teachers appreciate the efforts that leaders have taken to reduce workload, although the staff survey revealed that a few remain concerned about their work-life balance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to identify safeguarding concerns. They understand pupils' vulnerabilities. All adults understand that non-verbal pupils, in particular, need extra vigilance. Everyone is aware that even small changes in behaviour might be significant. Staff report any concerns promptly. Staff know how to use the school's procedures. The designated leader and her team manage concerns effectively.

Leaders know pupils and their families very well. They can provide early intervention from the school's own family support worker. They do not hesitate to refer to social care colleagues when necessary. They advocate for pupils and families to have timely support.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to reading makes use of a range of strategies. The use of phonics often adds confusion to the whole-word communication systems that pupils are learning successfully, and which pave the way into reading. Leaders should ensure that the school refines its preferred approach to teaching reading, so that the programme is consistently implemented and meets the needs of pupils as they progress through the school.
- Leaders' intent to promote pupils' well-being at all times of the school day has resulted in some recent pedagogic changes to lesson organisation. These bring benefits but sometimes, the within-lesson rotations are not well implemented, and this reduces pupils' focus on learning. Occasionally too, independent learning activities are not meaningful. Leaders should provide further training for teachers to ensure that the curriculum is implemented with pedagogic approaches that consistently support pupils to learn and be able to do more.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in October 2016.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	116600
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10200206
Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	128
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judit Callot
Headteacher	Catherine Le Roux
Website	www.riverside.hants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 and 12 October 2016 under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Riverside Community Special School caters for pupils between the ages of four and 11 years with moderate and complex special educational needs. A high proportion of pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is currently making use of one alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, a range of senior staff and teachers. The lead inspector talked either in person or by telephone with the joint chairs of governors and held a remote meeting with local authority officers. These discussions considered the quality of education, the wider experiences of pupils at the school, aspects of pupils' behaviour and leadership and management.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and reading, mathematics and physical education. In each subject, this included discussions with subject leaders and teachers, lesson visits with leaders, meeting pupils and looking at their work.
- Inspectors talked to parents at the start of the school day and evaluated 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Account was taken of the 46 staff questionnaires that were completed.
- A range of activities supported inspectors to look at safeguarding. These included meeting leaders, talking to staff and parents, and reviewing school documents and records. Inspectors also observed pupils' arrival at school and during break times and lunchtime.

Inspection team

Linda Jacobs, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Simon Yates

Ofsted Inspector

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