

# Inspection of a good school: Rowhill School

Main Road, Longfield, Kent DA3 7PW

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Inspection dates:

17 and 18 November 2021

## Outcome

Rowhill School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Rowhill really is a special school in so many ways. Pupils appreciate the care and support that staff provide. Pupils like that this is a school with a big heart and, 'lots of space, when we need it'. Smiles and good humour go a long way here, especially at the start of the school day as pupils are greeted by friends and staff in the 'drum'.

Older pupils appreciate the breadth of the curriculum choices they have, including the vocational opportunities on offer. They also feel that staff work hard and prepare them well for their next steps in education and for life beyond the school gates. When asked, younger pupils found it difficult to describe what could be better with their school, agreeing with each other that, 'mostly, it's really good'.

Pupils' behaviour is not perfect at Rowhill. However, staff have high expectations and are expert at managing situations when pupils' frustrations come to the fore. Because of this, heightened emotions are mostly calmed well before they impact negatively on learning or on pupils' relationships with their peers. Pupils shared that they do sometimes have friendship problems, but that 'miss' or 'sir' sort these out.

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

Although this is a relatively large special school, pupils enjoy what they describe as the 'small family school' feeling they experience here. They are positive about Rowhill when they compare it with previous settings they attended. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the curriculum because it is tailored to their needs and their interests. Staff really do go the extra mile to try to engage pupils in curriculum choices that interest and motivate. This includes enrichment and vocational activities such as equestrianism, horticulture, fisheries and a range of arts-based programmes and events.

Pupils enjoy the opportunity to make music at the school. This takes many forms, including music therapy and music as an academic subject. Specialist staff are skilled at bringing the best out of pupils. Classroom sessions are practical and lively. Pupils sing,

compose and perform on instruments with enthusiasm. Much of their work is recorded. Older pupils are proud of their collaborative work, some of which is published, including as soundtracks for specialist documentary films.

While the arts are central to day-to-day life at the school, pupils are also expected to develop their mathematics and English knowledge and skills. This includes pupils who are supported by the school's own alternative curriculum programme. Staff have high aspirations for pupils. Although many pupils are working at functional skills level by the time they leave the school, some also follow mathematics and English GCSE courses successfully.

Pupils often join the school having previously been out of full-time education for large periods of time. On joining the school, staff carefully and thoroughly check what pupils know and can do in different subject areas. For younger pupils, this includes a clear focus on assessing their ability to read. Staff follow the school's agreed phonics programme and, mostly, this is followed consistently. However, despite some staff being experienced and well trained to deliver the programme, some staff are less skilled or confident to do so.

The school's programme to support pupils' social and emotional development is strong. Much is covered as part of the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) or relationships and sex education schemes of work. However, the real strength in provision comes through the embedded culture of nurture and understanding that underpins all aspects of the school's work. Leaders, including those in positions of governance, see this as vital in the context of the school. Staff understand this. They know pupils and their families well and act as positive role models. They communicate and support pupils beyond the academic, and are very aware of pupils' interests, as well as their fears and the many challenges they face in their lives, in and out of school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture to safeguard pupils is strong here. One teacher summed up the ethos of staff in describing the constant 'on-going-ness' of the need to safeguard pupils. All staff understand how important this is in light of the context of this school for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are highly aware of the potential risks that pupils face in their day-to-day life, in and outside of school. They know that pupils with SEND have additional vulnerabilities with communication. They act quickly when they have concerns and have confidence in leaders to take action when required.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Not all staff who teach the school's phonics and early reading programme are as expert in its delivery as they should be. Leaders need to ensure that all staff involved in

teaching phonics and developing pupils' early reading and comprehension skills access appropriate training at the earliest opportunity. This will ensure that all staff who teach phonics and early reading do so with the confidence, skill and expertise required.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in June 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	119045
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10192874
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Stephen Jefferys
<b>Headteacher</b>	Geoff Bartrum
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.rowhill.kent.sch.uk">www.rowhill.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22 and 23 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Rowhill School serves pupils aged five to 16 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. A significant number of pupils also have additional needs associated with autism or communication difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school's curriculum is bespoke in manner and takes advantage of a range of off-site enrichment activities, including those that support the vocational strand of the curriculum offer.
- The school does not currently use additional independent alternative provision.

## 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 held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of the

governing body. He also held a telephone conversation with an officer from the local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, music and PSHCE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time. The lead inspector also heard pupils read to an adult from the school.
- The lead inspector met formally with two representative groups of pupils to gather their views about the school.
- Inspectors assessed the school's culture to keep pupils safe throughout the inspection. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies and safeguarding records. The single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children was also scrutinised.
- Inspectors also gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload. Staff, pupil and parent surveys were also considered.

### **Inspection team**

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lee Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

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