

Inspection of Rowden House School

Rowden House, Winslow, Bromyard HR7 4LS

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 June 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff know every pupil inside out. They understand the complexity of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff provide a high level of care and nurture for all pupils. Pupils feel safe because the staff look after them.

When pupils join the school, many have failed at their previous setting and have been out of education for some time. Pupils are often totally switched off from learning. Leaders and staff work tirelessly to get pupils to a point where they engage in their learning. Positive relationships exist between staff and pupils. Staff maintain clear and consistent routines. They support pupils to manage their behaviour exceptionally well.

Bullying is unlikely to happen due to the one-to-one support that every pupil receives. However, in preparation for life after school, leaders and staff help pupils to understand what appropriate behaviour looks like.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of school life. In particular, they value the open lines of communication with the school. Parents are pleased, relieved and assured that their children are well looked after and cared for. A parent commented, 'Since my son started at Rowden, it has been life changing for him and my family.'

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

Leaders organise a wide range of baseline checks on pupils' abilities and learning behaviours when they join the school. This helps staff to understand pupils' starting points. The multi-disciplinary team, which includes occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, contribute to this. Staff use the outcomes of these checks, alongside targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, to set specific learning outcomes for pupils. This supports leaders' aims for every pupil to experience a personalised curriculum that is sharply focused on their needs. The range of half-termly topics, including 'healthy lifestyles' and 'festivals', provide interesting backdrops for pupils' learning experiences. Pupils get the opportunity to work towards qualifications in order to recognise their achievements.

The development of pupils' communication and language skills underpin all aspects of school life. Leaders and staff promote a total communication approach for pupils effectively. This includes a combination of speech, photographs, pictures, symbols and signing. Staff make the most of every opportunity to develop pupils' skills in these areas.

Leaders have not lost sight of the importance of developing pupils' reading, writing and mathematical knowledge and skills across the curriculum. Staff are successfully encouraging pupils to develop a love of reading through sharing stories, such as The

Gruffalo. Staff help pupils to practise their early writing skills well through a range of sensory and more traditional approaches. The mathematics curriculum builds on pupils' starting points and includes the necessary level of repetition.

Staff explain concepts and give instructions clearly. This helps pupils to understand activities. Staff use questioning well to develop pupils' language skills and check on their level of understanding. Where learning is purposeful and provides an appropriate level of challenge, pupils engage well in their learning and achieve well. However, there are some instances where learning activities are not providing a sufficient level of challenge for pupils. In these instances, pupils are less engaged and do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils' personal development is a whole-school priority. The relationships and sex education curriculum supports this. Staff help pupils to understand what is, and what is not, appropriate in different situations and relationships. Staff do this in a way that pupils understand and relate to. Pupils have a voice in the school. For example, they make choices linked to the selection of school trips. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community. Recently, pupils entered a Glastonbury themed scarecrow competition in the local village and won one of the categories.

Specialised teaching in yoga and rebound therapy is part of the weekly timetable. These sessions support pupils' needs well. Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities that staff organise in the extensive school grounds and woodland area, such as mini beast hunts. Leaders organise a range of enrichment activities linked to the needs of pupils. These include looking after chickens, horse riding and visits to the local swimming pool. In addition, special trips, such as visiting the local lido and attending a pantomime, are enjoyed by pupils.

Leaders ensure that preparing pupils for adulthood underpins the curriculum, especially in the post-16 provision. The curriculum raises students' awareness of healthy lifestyles and personal hygiene effectively. Staff support students to understand aspects of independent living, such as budgeting, the preparation of meals, visiting shops and cafes, as well as tolerating haircuts. Post-16 students attend a range of carefully selected work experience settings. Pupils have a say in the choice of setting. Settings include a chicken farm, a café and a local care home.

The proprietor and school leaders have a clear vision for pupils. They are keen for pupils and students to be the best they can be and to be prepared for adulthood. The proprietor has put effective systems and procedures into place to keep them informed about what is happening in school. This helps to make their vision a reality.

Staff are right behind leaders in their efforts to constantly improve the school. Staff value the training they receive linked to safeguarding, behaviour and SEND. Staff say that leaders recognise potential in the workforce and encourage them to develop professionally. However, leaders have not organised subject-specific training for staff. Staff say that workload is manageable and there is no duplication of tasks. They add

that leaders are considerate of their well-being. Staff say, 'The little things that leaders do make a big difference.'

Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 as a suitable accessibility plan is in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff understand pupils' increased vulnerability due to their additional needs. Safeguarding is everyone's priority and responsibility. The proprietor has made sure that staff are well trained. Consequently, everyone knows what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Training includes updates linked to government guidance as well as specific aspects, such as peer-on-peer abuse. Health and safety are managed effectively. Pupils say they feel safe in school because the staff look after them. Leaders check staff's suitability to work with young people.

The safeguarding policy meets current government guidance and is available on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some instances, the curriculum is not providing a sufficient level of challenge for pupils. Consequently, at times, pupils are not achieving as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum consistently provides an appropriate level of challenge to meet the individual needs of pupils.
- Leaders have not organised subject-specific training for staff. As a result, some staff are not as well equipped as they could be to deliver subject-specific aspects of the curriculum. Leaders should organise subject-specific training and/or support for staff to further improve the delivery of the curriculum.

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 provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	117042
DfE registration number	884/6006
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10212767
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The SENAD Group
Chair	Brian Jones
Headteacher	Martin Carter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£114,200
Telephone number	01885 488 096
Website	https://senadgroup.com/rowden/
Email address	info@senadgroup.com
Dates of previous inspection	28 to 30 November 2017

Information about this school

- Rowden House School is an independent special school that caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. Pupils' prime areas of need are cognition and learning, and communication and interaction. Most pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is registered to admit up to 48 pupils. Pupils can join the school at different points in the school year.
- The school is in the same grounds as a children's home, which is also owned by the SENAD Group. Most pupils who attend the school reside at the children's home. The children's home is inspected separately.
- The school is surrounded by extensive, picturesque grounds and woodland that are used to support the delivery of the curriculum.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. A range of local authorities place pupils in the school.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school's last full inspection was in November 2017. The school was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

- 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 this into account in the evaluation.
- The children's home was inspected at the same time as the school. A separate set of judgements has been made and a separate report has been written.
- The lead inspector conducted a video call with the chief operations officer, who is the proprietor's representative. He met with the headteacher and the head of learning, who are members of the school's safeguarding team. The lead inspector also met with the lead teacher in her capacity as behaviour lead.
- As part of the inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in communication and language, mathematics, physical development, and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with senior leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and teaching assistants, and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school.
- The lead inspector toured the school premises to check their suitability.
- Safeguarding documents were checked, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children. The inspectors checked that staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures effectively across the school.
- Inspectors were unable to consider responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, due to the small number of responses. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with three parents during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, behaviour records and attendance information.
- The inspectors looked at information published on the school's website.

Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Antony Edkins

Ofsted Inspector

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