

Inspection of River Dart Academy

Shinners Bridge, Dartington, Devon TQ9 6JD

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at River Dart Academy receive a poor standard of education. Their needs are not well identified or supported. Staff allow pupils to opt out of learning too frequently. Pupils are not provided with the skills they need to be resilient and confident learners. Too many pupils have low levels of attendance. During the inspection, many pupils were unwilling to share their views politely.

Pupils have positive relationships with some staff. However, this is not typical. Pupils are repeatedly disrespectful to their peers and adults. Many staff have low expectations for pupils and therefore poor behaviour regularly goes unchallenged. Inappropriate language is commonplace. Pupils are frequently out of the classroom. Pupils report that bullying happens and that it is not dealt with effectively. Many just accept that bullying and 'banter' are the norm. As a result, some pupils feel unsafe at school. Parents and carers agree.

For a minority of pupils, leaders plan enrichment opportunities, such as visiting a local farm, a city museum and The Donkey Sanctuary. However, pupils do not receive the teaching they need to prepare them for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

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

The school curriculum is disjointed. It lacks ambition, coherence and structure. Pupils do not learn the crucial knowledge that they need. Leaders do not have an accurate oversight of what is being taught. Trust leaders, over time, have identified some significant areas of concern. However, the support they have put in place is yet to have any meaningful impact. In part, changes to staffing have impacted on this. Nevertheless, this means that the curriculum remains weak.

Leaders have not prioritised reading. Pupils do not benefit from a rigorous or well-sequenced curriculum. Those pupils in the early stages of learning to read are not supported well. They do not have books that match their ability. As a result, most pupils choose not to read. Gaps in learning, therefore, widen for these pupils. They then find it difficult to learn in other subjects, as they cannot read sufficiently well.

Leaders have not provided staff with appropriate professional training. This means that staff do not have the knowledge or expertise needed to provide pupils with an acceptable standard of education. Teachers' use of assessment to check what pupils know and remember from the curriculum is infrequent and ineffective. Staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low and this has led to some pupils, unfortunately, being proud of not having to engage in learning.

All pupils attending the school are those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Too frequently, the needs of pupils are not precisely identified. Therefore, pupils are not given the help that they need to be successful.

Leaders have not taken effective action to ensure that pupils behave well and safely. Classrooms are often disorderly. Staff do not have the necessary skills or support to tackle poor behaviour. Leaders do not take sufficient account of the risks associated with individual pupils' behaviour. Some pupils do value a recently introduced 'wowcher' reward system. Despite this, leaders frequently use suspension as a consequence. This has little impact.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is underdeveloped. Currently, pupils do not receive teaching that supports them to understand the values and laws of modern Britain. Leaders do not provide a suitable curriculum to ensure that pupils learn about, and respect, people's religious beliefs, cultures and protected characteristics. Pupils do not receive careers education. More positively, pupils learn about the dangers of drugs and alcohol from a local drugs and alcohol service. They also understand the risks when using online platforms and apps.

Leaders, including governors, have been too slow in tackling weaknesses. Staff indicate that their workload and well-being are sometimes negatively impacted by policy changes and unclear expectations.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Pupils' disorderly and disrespectful behaviour is a significant contributory factor to why pupils are not safe. Pupils regularly abscond from the school site. Staff are not always vigilant when pupils who should be in class are not there, therefore meaning pupils are out of sight and potentially at risk. Pupils' safety is put at significant risk because fire procedures are not managed effectively; during the inspection, there was a chaotic response to an unplanned fire alarm. This behaviour is typical.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training. They report concerns in a timely manner and are aware of local safeguarding concerns. However, leaders' oversight of how these concerns are managed is weak and school procedures for recording are not always followed. This means that the risks facing some very vulnerable pupils are not available to school and trust leaders when the needs of individual pupils are reviewed. Trust leaders recognise there are weaknesses in some safeguarding practices, yet they remain.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Safeguarding is not effective. Leaders' oversight of procedures and records to keep pupils safe is not robust or timely. As a result, pupils' welfare and well-being are at put risk. As a matter of urgency, leaders should ensure that all procedures and practices to keep pupils safe are effective and reviewed regularly.

- Pupils' behaviour is disorderly and disrespectful, and sometimes unsafe. Staff do not have high enough expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. Leaders have not set out a consistent approach to how poor behaviour is managed. Therefore, pupils are often disrespectful to their peers and to adults. They regularly disrupt learning or refuse to participate. Suspensions are too high and have little impact. Leaders should ensure that they develop a consistent approach to the management of behaviour, which is commonly understood and actioned.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance have not acted quickly or successfully to identify and tackle the failings at the school. As a result, pupils are not receiving an adequate education. Those responsible for governance should act with urgency to ensure that leadership capacity and expertise are developed to eradicate these shortcomings.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils benefit from a coherent, well-sequenced curriculum. Pupils do not learn the important knowledge they need. Leaders should ensure that there is an ambitious curriculum in place which furthers pupils' learning successfully.
- Leaders have not ensured that the needs of pupils, including those with SEND, have been identified and are met. Therefore, many pupils do not receive the support that they need to learn well. Leaders must make sure that teachers are helped to understand the needs of pupils and how to adapt their teaching to better meet pupils' needs effectively.
- The reading curriculum is weak. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read are not supported sufficiently. Consequently, pupils do not become better readers and therefore struggle to follow learning in other subjects. Leaders should ensure that there is an ambitious curriculum in place and that the weakest readers receive the support they need.
- Pupils do not take part in meaningful opportunities and learning to support their broader development. Leaders have failed to ensure that there is adequate careers provision. Pupils do not learn the essential knowledge that they need about religious beliefs, cultures, fundamental British values or protected characteristics. Pupils are unprepared for future employment, education or life in modern Britain, and have not been helped to understand what careers are available to them. Leaders need to ensure that provision for pupils' personal development is coherently planned, so pupils are better prepared for their next stage.
- Having considered the evidence, we strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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.

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	146735
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10256579
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision sponsored
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christian Jenkins
Principal	Matt Caunter
Website	www.wavemat.org/river-dart-academy
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- River Dart Academy is part of Wave multi-academy trust.
- The principal took up his post in July 2022. The assistant headteacher took up his post in January 2023. There have been some recent changes to staffing.
- Pupil referrals are received from the local authority. The majority of pupils have a single registration placement. A small number of pupils on roll are dual registered.
- The school uses one registered and two unregistered alternative providers.
- The school does not meet the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, including the principal, the assistant headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also met with multi-academy trust leaders, including the chief executive officer, the director of education, the curriculum improvement leader and the executive headteacher. The lead inspector met with the chair of the trust board and one other trustee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. In early reading and mathematics, inspectors also visited a sample of lessons.
- The lead inspector spoke with the designated safeguarding leader and the safeguarding compliance officer to discuss the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe. She considered the school's recruitment procedures, staff induction and training, records of concern and engagement with external agencies. The inspectors spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Donna Briggs, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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