

Inspection of a good school: Riverwalk School

Mayfield Road, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 2PD

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 June 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Riverwalk School. They arrive each morning full of enthusiasm for the day ahead. Pupils develop their communication skills well. They are supported to use a variety of communication systems and find what works for them. Pupils learn to be confident and more independent.

Pupils enjoy accessing the many outside play activities, including lots of opportunities for bouncing or swinging. This helps many to feel calm. The positive relationships in each class mean that each pupil feels part of a close community. They develop long-standing friendships. Pupils are well cared for by staff. Any rare examples of unkindness are dealt with quickly. Pupils feel safe and are kept safe.

There is a strong emphasis on making sure pupils access age-appropriate opportunities. For example, the key stage 3 and 4 'youth club' meets and offers social interaction across classes. Pupils, including those in the sixth form, learn the skills for independent living.

Pupils' long-term curriculum, however, is not well organised. They are not learning as well, or as much, as they should. This includes pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read.

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

Leaders' curriculum planning in several areas is in an early stage of development. In these curriculum areas it is not clear specifically what pupils will learn and when. This includes for students in the sixth form.

Leaders have worked closely with staff to ensure that any resources used are age appropriate, while still meeting pupils' developmental needs. Leaders have developed

some assessment processes well, most notably in speech, language, communication, and physical development. Staff set appropriate developmental targets for each pupil and review these routinely. Staff use this information to adapt their teaching and support for pupils. As a result, pupils make strong progress in these areas.

Pupils of all ages enjoy sharing stories, books, and songs with staff. Staff bring these to life by including music, sensory props, and actions. Pupils who are ready to learn to read are taught phonics. However, not all staff have good knowledge of how to teach the chosen scheme effectively. Therefore, these pupils are not learning to read as well as they should.

Pupils access different social and cultural experiences through their learning. For example, tasting unfamiliar foods and hearing music from other countries. The long-term plan for when this happens is, as with the rest of the curriculum, at an early stage of development. Pupils learn to understand turn-taking and respect for others. They are polite and welcoming.

The school is calm and peaceful. Pupils who show negative behaviours are supported to settle and get back to learning. Staff ably adapt provision where needed to engage pupils.

Trust leaders have been focusing on supporting other schools in the trust. School leaders work hard to manage the day-to-day issues. Trustees and governors have not ensured that this school's leadership team has enough capacity to address the larger strategic priorities. Many staff value the support they do get from some specific leaders. However, some staff are concerned about the capacity of leadership and management to support them.

Trustees and governors do not have enough understanding of the effectiveness of the curriculum. They do not know about the impact of specific funding streams such as the pupil premium. Some trustees and governors have taken on their roles recently. Their focus has been closing the current trust and transferring to the new one. This has not happened as quickly as hoped, leaving the school in a period of limbo.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have overseen recent improvements to safeguarding practice. They have made sure that all staff have had training that focused on making sure vulnerable pupils are kept safe. Staff know the pupils well and report any concerns promptly.

Leaders use this information to make referrals as appropriate, and work closely with parents and external agencies when needed. Pupils are kept safe.

Governors make sure they and school leaders are sure of, and fulfil, their responsibilities.

All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Trust leaders have not ensured that school leaders have sufficient capacity to undertake essential strategic work. As a result, the curriculum is underdeveloped in some areas and staff are not well supported to improve their practice. Trustees and governors need to ensure that there is enough leadership capacity to drive improvements.
- Leaders have not ensured that the content of the curriculum is well planned and laid out for staff to follow. Leaders have not established what experiences and knowledge pupils will access over time. This means that pupils do not experience a high-quality curriculum. Leaders need to make sure that the long-term plans are in place and that these plans support staff to deliver the intended curriculum well.
- Staff are not well trained in the teaching of phonics. This means that when some pupils are ready to learn to read, they are not well supported to do so. Leaders need to ensure that staff are given appropriate training and support so that they can effectively support pupils to learn to read.
- Trustees and governors do not have enough understanding of the quality of curriculum and its impact on pupils' outcomes. They do not monitor the impact of specific funding streams, such as the pupil premium grant, closely enough. This means that leaders have not been held to account for decisions made and the impact of their work. Trustees and governors need to establish systems to check on and hold leaders to account for their work.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, of the same name, to be good 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.

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	146418
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10268799
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Richard Fletcher
Headteacher	Jan Hatchell
Website	www.riverwalk.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Riverwalk School converted to become an academy school in February 2019. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The school is part of the Believe Engage Succeed Trust. The headteacher is also the chief executive officer.
- The transfer of the school to the Consortium Trust has been agreed by the regional schools director. The planned transfer has been delayed several times but is currently planned for July 2023.
- The school has an off-site base, providing part of the early years and key stage 1 provision, at Sextons Manor Primary School, Greene Road, Bury St. Edmunds IP33 3HG. This provides places for 10 pupils.
- The school provides places for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

- The school does not use any 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the deputy headteacher and other members of staff with leadership responsibilities. They met with other members of staff. They also spoke with members of the governing body and trustees. They spoke to the chair of trustees of the incoming trust.
- The headteacher was not present during the inspection.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: speech, language, communication and reading, physical education, and personal and social education. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors also visited a range of other lessons and activities.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding files. Inspectors spoke to leaders, including the designated safeguarding leaders, staff, and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the 25 responses, including free-text responses, to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the 72 answers to the staff survey and two responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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