

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Riverbank School

Princethorpe Way, Coventry, West Midlands CV3 2QD

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Inspection dates:

27 and 28 June 2023

## **Outcome**

Riverbank School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

At Riverbank School, every moment matters. Staff have a kindness and quiet determination that underpins their commitment to every pupil. They work hard to ensure that each lesson enriches pupils' lives. Pupils embrace this belief that staff have in them and these opportunities to thrive.

Partnerships with families, education, health and social care services lie at this special provision's heart. Additional needs are quickly identified, and special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) are clearly understood. Provision is successful in helping pupils overcome barriers caused by these needs.

Leaders and staff aim to ensure that each child believes in themselves and their ability to make their own choices. Consequently, behaviour in lessons, during breaktimes and at lunchtime is positive as pupils feel safe and valued. Pupils have varying understandings of bullying, but they all agree that staff would act to help them if they thought they were at risk. Leaders investigate all reports of perceived bullying and act when required.

Pupils thrive from the opportunities to develop their own interests and hobbies. Forest school, fishing trips, theatre visits and public dance and music performances at the cathedral or train station enrich pupils' experiences. Not a moment is wasted, and every effort is made to prepare pupils for the best lives possible.

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

Pupils get off to a great start when they arrive at Riverbank. They come from a wide range of different mainstream and specialist settings across the city. When they arrive, staff work hard to understand the precise nature of their SEND. Communication and partnership with parents and carers are prioritised to secure the support they think their child needs.

Subject leaders continually improve and refine their curriculums. They have identified the knowledge that pupils should learn and when. Lessons are well planned and build

precisely on what pupils have learned in the past. Across all subjects, expectations and ambitions are equally high. Not only do lessons provide pupils with knowledge of subjects such as mathematics, English, the arts, science or humanities, but they also give them the knowledge they need to be successful and independent citizens of Coventry.

Across all classes, there is a relentless commitment to overcoming barriers to learning caused by SEND. Staff work hard to understand not only the pupils' diagnosis but also the challenges that pupils face because of that diagnosis. This means that the pupils get the help they need. When needed, the school's own 'Wave' provision gives pupils a short-term intervention to better understand the most complex needs and work out what they need to adapt in the current provision.

Some pupils start at Riverbank not able to read confidently. Regular phonics sessions help all pupils develop those essential skills to catch up quickly. Appropriately focused intervention sessions provide opportunities for pupils to build fluency and expression in their reading. An impressive lunchtime reading club helps pupils to develop their interest in reading alongside peers and staff passionate about books and reading.

Leaders have established a well-thought-through 'pathway' model for teaching the curriculum. Navigator, Explorer and Adventurer pathways provide pupils with the environments, staff specialism and resources appropriate for their SEND. For example, for those pupils with speech, language and communication needs, symbols or signing are used to support the development of essential vocabulary or support communication skills. Teachers carefully assess how much pupils have learned and remembered from the past. When needed, staff adapt lessons or provide opportunities for pupils to catch up quickly.

There is an unrelenting drive to prepare pupils for the world around them. Lessons teach them about staying healthy, understanding different cultures, cooking and preparing meals and doing household chores such as cleaning or laundry. A very broad range of lunchtime and after-school clubs develop pupils' own interests and hobbies. Careers education and opportunities to build real-world work experiences are promoted from the start. Consequently, more pupils than ever before enter vocational training such as supported internships and sometimes the workplace when they leave Riverbank.

The school council is a strength of the school. Staff empower pupils to have a powerful voice in improving their school and taking an active role in the city. School councillors take their role seriously to mentor and support other pupils. Environmental projects, advising local authority services and empowering others with SEND are just some of the roles of this influential group.

Staff are unequivocally positive about the school. They feel supported and empowered to innovate and be creative in their support for pupils. They are particularly positive about the support from them for their own well-being. All staff who responded to the staff survey strongly agreed that the school is well led and managed.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have carefully considered the potential safeguarding risks for a young person with SEND growing up in a city, including any specific local risks. Regular staff training not only develops their understanding of what to do if they have concerns but how they would spot pupils who might be at risk of such things as gang culture or criminal or online exploitation. Consequently, staff are quick to act to raise concerns when needed. Leaders act with urgency to address these concerns.

Lessons across all subjects help pupils know what they need to do to stay safe in school and the community.

## 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 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 school to be outstanding in May 2017.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141376
<b>Local authority</b>	Coventry
<b>Inspection number</b>	10228363
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	197
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	64
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Julie Sullivan
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Lisowski
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.riverbankacademy.org.uk">www.riverbankacademy.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	10 and 11 May 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision for pupils who are currently unable to access school for different reasons
- The school meets 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.
- The school has its own provision on the same site but away from the main school building for pupils who need a short-term intervention to identify and assess their specific needs.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has developed its own laundry and independent life skills suite and an enhanced provision in an old bungalow at the front of the school for short-term assessment and provision for those with the most complex needs (The Wave).

## 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.
- The inspectors discussed leaders' actions to support pupils to return to school following the pandemic.
- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic development and physical development. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They scrutinised the employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. They also found out about health and safety procedures and routines.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, transport escorts, drivers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- An inspector spoke with representatives of the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the local authority. A blended remote and face-to-face conversation was also held with members of the local governing body and the directors of the MAT.

## Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jonathan Leonard

His Majesty's Inspector

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