

Inspection of Riverbank Primary School

Unit 2 Ripponden Mill, Ripponden, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX6 4DH

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

There are clear routines and expectations to support pupils' behaviour at Riverbank Primary School. Staff consider the individual needs of pupils as expectations may need to be adapted. Pupils benefit from a positive start to their day. Staff warmly greet pupils each morning. This creates a caring and calm atmosphere as pupils move off to their classroom. Skilled staff communicate well with pupils to help them to manage their behaviour.

Pupils know what bullying is. They would tell an adult if they thought it was happening to someone.

Pupils are safe at the school. They trust the adults to help and support them. The in-house clinical team use speech and language and play therapies to support pupils' communication and social skills. Educational psychologists provide extra support. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive, nurturing and caring.

Pupils' mental health and social and emotional development are central to everything the school does. Leaders rightly prioritise this along with safeguarding. However, pupils do not learn consistently well in some areas of the wider curriculum. There has not been a sharp enough focus on ensuring that there is a rigorous approach to teaching phonics.

Pupils experience lessons outdoors, where they learn about the natural environment. This helps them to manage risks and become active and independent.

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

Leaders have prioritised pupils' learning in core areas of English, mathematics and science. They are also building pupils' knowledge in the wider curriculum. In food studies, pupils learn about diet and nutrition. This helps prepare pupils for the next stage in their education and their future lives. Some aspects of the wider curriculum are less developed. In history and geography, the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn has not been mapped out. Pupils' learning is less secure in these areas.

Leaders recently introduced a programme to teach phonics. Some staff have not received training on this programme. Consequently, some teachers do not have the subject knowledge to follow the programme correctly to help pupils read. As a result, there are missed opportunities for pupils to revisit and practise sounds. Teachers do not use their assessment of pupils' reading knowledge to help pupils catch up in a timely way. They do not match the books pupils read to the sounds they know. This hinders pupils' reading fluency. These weaknesses negatively impact the independent school standards that relate to teaching well-planned lessons, the use of prior attainment and teacher subject knowledge.

The teaching of mathematics is a strength of the school. Leaders tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of each pupil. Pupils enjoy mathematics and work hard to complete the tasks that are set for them. Teachers check pupils' understanding well and identify and address misconceptions swiftly.

Teachers' use of assessment in the wider curriculum is less effective than it is in mathematics. In the wider curriculum, teachers check that a particular curriculum topic has been taught. However, they do not check what pupils know and understand about that topic. This means the independent school standard around assessment is not met.

Leaders are mindful of pupils' background and maturity when introducing personal, social and health education (PSHE) or relationship and sex education lessons. They examine the programme to ensure it does not negatively trigger an emotional or physical response. Leaders develop pupils' character traits such as resilience in PSHE lessons. Consequently, pupils demonstrate resilience in other curriculum areas. For example, a pupil who remained motivated during a challenging activity exclaimed at the end, 'I am resilient!' Staff support pupils to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence by creating a safe environment where pupils can speak freely.

Leaders provide pupils with leadership opportunities. For example, the school council influenced the inclusion of a mini obstacle course in the new forest school area. This space has been developed on the school site to accommodate outdoor learning cabins. This has greatly improved the school environment.

The proprietor body holds leaders to account through their monthly supervision meetings. Here, they discuss the challenges, successes and setbacks the team face. This is a valuable reflective process for leaders. However, the current shortcomings in the curriculum mean that some of the independent school standards are not met.

The staff are overwhelmingly supportive of the leadership team. Early career teachers (ECT) value the advice and guidance they are given by leaders to improve their teaching practice.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding through their training programme. As a small school, leaders and staff know the pupils and the families well. They recognise that small changes in a pupil's behaviour or mood could indicate a concern about their welfare.

Leaders keep detailed records of safeguarding incidents and concerns. They share information sensitively to keep everyone safe. Pupils have access to an on-site clinical team of counsellors and play therapists to support them.

Leaders recognise that the many water sources in Calderdale present a danger to

pupils. As a result, they use resources from the fire brigade to teach pupils about water safety.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some adults have not received training to implement the new phonics programme. This means that there are inconsistencies in how well pupils are taught to read. Leaders should ensure that all adults involved in supporting pupils' early reading are trained to follow the systematic approach to help pupils read.
- Some aspects of the wider curriculum are not fully developed. Leaders have not mapped out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn or the order in which this should happen. Leaders should work with staff to enable pupils to learn well across all areas of the curriculum.
- Leaders do not have effective processes in place to check how well pupils are learning the wider curriculum. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified. Leaders should work with staff to better understand pupils' learning across the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	141608
DfE registration number	381/6015
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	10267670
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Timeout Children's Homes Ltd
Chair	Dominic Macauley
Headteacher	James Docherty
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000
Telephone number	01422 415529
Website	www.riverbank-school.com/
Email address	james.docherty@timeouthomes.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 to 14 March 2019

Information about this school

- Riverbank Primary School is an independent special school. The school is registered to provide full-time education for up to 20 pupils. Almost half of the pupils are residentially cared for by Timeout Children's Home.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans. Many pupils have social, emotional or mental health needs. Some have a diagnosis of autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- Day pupils are placed at the school by several local authorities.
- Leaders aim for pupils to transition back into mainstream school at an appropriate time.
- Some lessons, including food studies and physical education, take place at Brearley Hall School, another Timeout Children's Home independent school.
- There has been a significant number of new staff joining the school since the end of the pandemic. Most class teachers are ECTs.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the lead teacher, staff and pupils. Meetings were also held with the chair of the proprietor body. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone to representatives of the three local authorities that commission places at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, PSHE, food studies and forest school. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, spoke to pupils and teachers, visited lessons and looked at their work.
- Inspectors looked at the curriculum structure in other subjects.
- Inspectors observed staff listening to pupils read.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records, attendance figures, behaviour records and policies.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at the park for breaktime.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents from the responses to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- The views of staff were considered from meeting with them and from the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- The views of pupils were considered from meeting with them.

Inspection team

Alison Stephenson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Bernard Clark

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and

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