

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Rowan School

4 Durvale Court, Furniss Avenue, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S17 3PT

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 July 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding 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?

Familiar staff are waiting to greet pupils as they arrive in school. This helps pupils to settle and make a smooth transition from home to the classroom, helping to ensure a calm start to the day. Staff and leaders have high expectations of all pupils and take every opportunity to praise pupils who are making the right choice or managing their behaviour well.

Leaders and most staff are ambitious for their pupils and are focused on ensuring that pupils learn as much as possible during their time in school. Despite pupils' very high levels of need, they engage with learning well, particularly where the subject holds their interest. For example, one group was transfixed when staff brought to life the book 'Where The Wild Things Are'. Using masks, crowns and a wolf suit, staff delighted and engaged the class, who listened avidly, following the story with interest and concentration from beginning to end.

Nearly two thirds of pupils in school are preverbal. Despite this, learning to read is a high priority for pupils. A newly introduced phonics scheme is used regularly with pupils who are able to access this level of learning. This supports reading well. The school library has not been readily accessible to pupils, as it has been used to support pupils who needed individual timetables. However, staff have not been defeated, and they use a book trolley to share books with pupils.

Pupils' levels of need are identified in their education and health care plans. These enable staff to understand pupils' needs and support them to manage their behaviour. Pupils do go into crisis at times, and other pupils sometimes find this difficult. However, when asked whether bullying happened in school, pupils confidently commented, 'There are no bullies in this school. We are all kind to each other.'

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

The needs of the pupils attending the school have changed over the last five years. School leaders have recognised that the curriculum previously in place no longer meets the needs of pupils. Leaders have spent time researching a new curriculum model. A new curriculum has been crafted that more accurately meets the needs of the current pupils.

Teachers and other staff members have enthusiastically embraced the new curriculum, and they have recognised the importance of making the change. However, not all aspects of the curriculum are embedded. For example, the changes to the communication curriculum have been made in partnership with the speech and language therapy team. These changes require staff to continue to communicate with pupils using pictures, photographs, symbols and words, as well as introducing pupils to a core vocabulary of key words. This approach teaches pupils the words frequently used in day-to-day communication. These two approaches to communication skills are very different. Some staff need further support to build their confidence in teaching using the new system.

Phonics is taught regularly to children in the early years and to those older pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Individual phonics sessions reinforce the sounds letters make and help pupils to use this knowledge when learning how to read. Working closely with the pupil well-being team, staff support pupils who are pre-verbal to start to take their first steps to verbal communication.

The mathematics curriculum is sequenced and structured to allow pupils to work at an appropriate level of challenge. Pupils enjoy learning in mathematics and see a clear purpose for the learning they undertake. In some lessons, opportunities to reinforce mathematical terms and symbols are missed, and this reduces pupils' understanding. A new communication strategy has recently been introduced in mathematics, but this is not securely in place in all classrooms.

The expressive arts curriculum is planned and sequenced well. The curriculum is used to help develop and practise a range of different skills, including fine motor skills, mark making and making music. Staff are confident when delivering this subject area and personalise the curriculum to ensure individual pupils' needs are met.

The school monitors pupils' progress by identifying and tracking the very small steps pupils take in learning. In addition, staff measure pupils' understanding regularly by using simple questions to check individual learning.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' progress and ability to join in with planned activities. They know and understand pupils' needs well and are often able to distract pupils before they become disengaged and dysregulated. The use of physical intervention by staff is infrequent, despite the pupils' very high levels of need. At times when pupils are finding it particularly difficult to remain regulated, staff can call on professionals from the therapy team to support and advise them. Regular multi-disciplinary team meetings enable these discussions to take place.

Pupils enjoy a range of extra activities that enrich the curriculum. Trips to a wide range of places broaden the opportunities for pupils to see, experience and enjoy new places and activities. There are many visitors to school over the course of the year. They include theatre troupes, local police officers and fitness coaches. This enables pupils to watch live theatre performances, discuss road safety and participate in national fitness days. Themed days this year have included Pride Day and Eid-ul-Adha celebrations, which have contributed well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding.

School leaders, including governors, know the school well. They are passionate about supporting and developing all pupils to achieve the best they can. Staff are very positive about the leaders and governors. Those spoken to said that they felt very well supported to achieve a good work-life balance. Staff commented that leaders were very good at listening and responding to them. Many agreed that working in school felt like being part of a family where each member 'looked out for you'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Records are kept by the designated safeguarding lead and are shared appropriately with staff members on a need-to-know basis. Safer recruitment checks are undertaken rigorously in line with requirements. Leaders have developed strong links with external agencies. These links enable the school to secure the help that pupils and their families need quickly.

Pupils spoken to understand simple ways to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils are taught not to speak to strangers or give away details about themselves online. Older pupils have started learning about consent and the need to respect others' wishes. While leaders are aware of the needs of pupils and are teaching them how to keep safe, they are not as knowledgeable as they could be about safeguarding concerns in the locality.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- School leaders have recognised the need to revise the curriculum in line with the needs of a changing cohort of pupils. A very thoughtful, research-based approach has been taken to planning the new curriculum. However, not all staff are confident in the implementation of the new curriculum. The changes required in delivering the communication aspects of the curriculum are proving to be particularly difficult. Further training and support are needed to bring staff up to speed on delivering and embedding this aspect of the curriculum.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in December 2013.

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	107171
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	10269242
Type of school	Special School
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dean Linkhorn
Headteacher	Ms Carla Ribeiro
Website	www.rowanschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a special school that caters for pupils whose primary condition is autism. Some pupils have other needs, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and complex speech, language and communication needs.
- Over the last five years, the school has seen an increase in pupils' needs. For example, many more pupils starting at the school are now preverbal.

The school does not currently use 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.
- The inspection team met with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, middle leaders and the curriculum teams responsible for communication, phonics and literacy, mathematics and expressive arts.
- The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body. The chair of governors spoke to the lead inspector by telephone.

- The lead inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority, who is also the school improvement partner, by telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, communication, phonics and literacy and expressive arts. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subject areas.
- The lead inspector spoke to the designated safeguarding lead for the school and checked records on the safeguarding online platform used by the school. Inspectors spoke with pupils about how safe they felt in school and checked staff knowledge of recent safeguarding training.
- Inspectors met with a small group of parents and carers to gather their views on the school.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Christina Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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