

Inspection of Rivers Education Support Centre

Old Essex Road, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire EN11 0AA

Inspection dates: 31 October to 1 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are warmly greeted as they arrive at the 'Rivers'. They feel valued and respected. This is important as pupils seek to reignite an interest in learning. Staff know all pupils well. The clear guidance and nurture they provide quickly builds the trust of pupils. Pupils are happy and feel safe at school.

A calm atmosphere permeates the school. There are no raised voices or any type of disruption. Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. High levels of respect result from clear expectations of all staff. Staff act as excellent role models. Pupils know they can always seek advice or help from adults. They are confident the support they receive resolves any of their concerns.

Pupils actively contribute to helping improve the school environment. Examples of their artwork makes for attractive displays around the building. Pupils of all ages help in the construction of sandpits, barbeques and the school's allotment beds.

Parents are positive about the contribution the school has made to their child's education. They use words and phrases, such as 'never giving up' and 'going above and beyond', to describe their own experiences.

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

All staff commit to ensuring that pupils re-engage fully into their learning. Many pupils have missed significant periods of time out of education. The school has thought carefully about a curriculum that meets pupils' needs. A strong focus on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) weaves through everything. Alongside academic learning, pupils learn to regain their confidence. This means that almost all pupils successfully reintegrate into mainstream education. For older pupils, it prepares them well for post-16 placements.

The school's plans cover different areas of learning. This allows teachers to tailor a curriculum for every individual pupil. However, some plans lack preciseness. They do not clearly identify all the steps that build pupils' knowledge. On a few occasions, learning does build on what pupils already know. Pupils in key stage 4 achieve well. They work towards high-quality qualifications that help them to move on to further education or employment.

Assessment systems help staff to identify pupils' starting points. Pupil passports provide teachers with targets and strategies to support learning in class. Regular reviews check that these remain relevant. Teachers amend the curriculum to address any gaps in pupils' learning.

Reading is a priority. There is effective teaching of phonics. Discrete lessons are well taught. Adults ensure pupils revisit and practise phonics to secure their understanding. Older pupils are also assessed for their reading knowledge. Bespoke

interventions help to build reading accuracy and fluency. This means that they successfully access the curriculum.

There are clear and effective processes for identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some pupils arrive at the provision without any identification of any needs. Staff are quick to spot signs that pupils may need extra help. They work effectively with external agencies to put plans in place. Adults understand how to adapt work so that pupils with SEND achieve well.

Across both sites the environments are orderly and purposeful. From negative experiences, pupils quickly learn to build positive relationships with staff and peers. During breaktimes, adults spend time with pupils, some serving toast and refreshments. Kind words of encouragement helps to increase pupils' self-belief. Pupils rekindle positive attitudes about themselves and their work. This serves them well when they return to school or go to other destinations.

The school's curriculum for PSHE is a vital cog in support of pupils' personal development. Adults use it flexibly to address specific needs. They learn about forming safe and healthy relationships. Pupils relish the opportunities to build their resilience through an extensive outdoor programme. Pupils also receive effective guidance and advice about careers.

The members of the school's management committee share the same ambitions for every pupil. They use their insights to check and challenge the work of the school.

Staff are complimentary about their school leaders. They welcome their 'listening ears' and provide regular treats that show a care for their well-being, such as 'Friday raffles'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some curriculum plans, the key knowledge lacks some clarity in how it builds towards identified end points. This means that not all staff fully understand the small steps that secure pupils' knowledge and ensure that it builds successfully on prior learning. Leaders should ensure that all their curriculum plans identify the important knowledge that ensures pupils make the strongest progress in their learning.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135890
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10288485
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15 (33 pupils are dual registered)
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Hawkins
Headteacher	Andrew Stuart
Website	www.riversesc.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is based on two sites, one in Hoddesdon at the Rivers Education Support Centre EN11 0AA and the other at a centre in Churchfields, Hertford SG13 8AE.
- An additional key stage was added to the provision in June 2022. The Phoenix Centre admits primary-aged pupils who are at risk or have been permanently excluded from their schools.
- The school is commissioned to admit pupils from two regions in the local authority. A fair access panel convenes to consider places for pupils who are at risk or have been permanently excluded from education from these local areas.
- Some pupils may attend the provision on a short-term basis and are dual registered with their home mainstream school.
- The school makes use of two alternative providers, Hertford Regional College and CTP training Academy.
- The headteacher was appointed to post in September 2019.

Information about this inspection

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

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, teachers, and management committee members, including the chair.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and English, mathematics, PSHE and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with teachers, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and talked to pupils.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders and staff, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the Ofsted staff and pupil survey.
- The lead inspector spoke with a headteacher from a local school and also to a parent.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michael Williams

His Majesty's Inspector

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