

Inspection of a good school: Rivermead School

Forge Lane, Gillingham, Kent ME7 1UG

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 February 2024

Outcome

Rivermead School continues to be a good school.

The executive headteacher of this school is Mark Burgiss. This school is part of Rivermead Inclusive Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Tina Lovey, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Justin Stuart.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are well prepared for a bright and happy future because dedicated staff pay meticulous attention to meeting each individual's needs. As soon as pupils join the school, staff identify the precise support that pupils need to achieve their best. Those that need specialist care receive this from a team of expert staff. Most pupils in the 'Triple R' provision successfully return to their mainstream school or go on to college. The appropriate therapeutic care, alongside the ambitious academic curriculum on offer, readies them for the next stage of their education.

Pupils meet the school's high expectations of behaviour because they know that staff want the very best for them. Calm and consistent routines make it clear what pupils need to do to make school a positive place in which to learn. Pupils take pride in their successes because staff take time to celebrate these. Corridors display pupils' wonderful work and pictures of them putting life skills into practice when out in the community. Pupils proudly wear bright pin badges to show how many points they have earned for showing 'SUPERstar' behaviours, such as resilience. Pupils learn to speak with confidence. They are keen to greet visitors to school with a warm smile or a friendly handshake.

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

The curriculum has been carefully designed to meet pupils' varying needs. The school has developed ambitious learning pathways to prepare pupils with the skills and knowledge they need for success. In every subject in each pathway, the curriculum builds knowledge

and skills in a logical way. The curriculum revisits common ideas. This helps pupils remember learning well.

In the sixth form, staff regularly check that students learn a curriculum that best suits their needs and ambitions. Students study course combinations that promote a broad understanding of concepts, such as learning about health and safety alongside construction and first aid. Students achieve a range of ambitious qualifications that prepare them for the world of work or further education. Students who would benefit from additional support to be ready for adulthood attend the entry partnership room (EPR). Here they learn skills such as managing money, learning to cook and taking care of their personal needs. This well-considered approach helps prepare students for adulthood.

Detailed support plans set out the help that pupils need in order to learn well. Staff use these plans, alongside their own subject expertise, to design lessons that help pupils secure their understanding of what they are learning. The school has identified that in some lessons, teaching does not always support pupils to extend their thinking. Leaders have already provided staff with additional training to strengthen this.

In Year 7, staff regularly check how fluently pupils can read. Teachers design lessons to help pupils practise joining new sounds together to form words. This is helping these pupils read more confidently. However, the same approach is not in place for pupils in other year groups. Currently, the support for older pupils who find reading more difficult is intermittent. This potentially hinders how well pupils can use their reading skills to learn the school's curriculum.

The school's approach to developing pupils' personal development is exemplary. Staff take great care to prepare pupils for adulthood. An extensive careers programme inspires pupils to aim for ambitious destinations or employment when they leave the school. Pupils learn to be increasingly independent and safe in the community. Guest speakers visit assemblies to help pupils to be aware of the risks of knife crime. Carefully planned visits to the local shops help pupils to practise skills such as road safety and using money. Pupils learn to understand and celebrate differences between people. The 'safe space' club and student leadership groups further promote the culture of inclusivity that pervades the school.

Pupils attend school well because they value the nurturing relationship that they build with staff. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. They use this knowledge to provide effective help so that pupils learn to manage their own feelings. Pupils behave very well because the rules are clear and consistently applied by all staff. Pupils enjoy doing the right thing and gain a sense of pride through rewards such as badges and certificates. They play a keen role in making the school a very happy place to be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Support for pupils at the earlier stages of reading is not yet embedded across the whole school. This potentially hinders how well these pupils learn to read. The school must implement plans to provide the specific phonics support that some pupils need to help them become confident and fluent readers.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Rivermead School, to be good in September 2014.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	142555
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10296435
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	56
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Justin Stuart
CEO of trust	Tina Lovey
Headteacher	Mark Burgiss (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.rivermead.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive headteacher was appointed in January 2024.
- The school caters for pupils with SEND, including autism, speech, language and communication needs, physical disabilities and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates over three separate sites offering six different provisions. Two of the three sixth-form provisions operate from MidKent College. Sixth-form students attend some courses run by the college as part of their curriculum provision. The main site located in Gillingham is attended by key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils. The site located in Rainham provides the Triple R provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The site is also used for Pathways provision, which is for pupils in

key stage 4 with complex SEND. The site also hosts the EPR for sixth-form students who need additional support to be ready to attend college.

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with the CEO and other executive leaders, the chair of trustees and the chair of the local advisory board.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science, and personal, social and health education. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at other aspects of the school's curriculum, including the reading provision.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of governor meetings and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.

Inspection team

Michelle Payne, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jason Philipsz

Ofsted Inspector

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