

Inspection of an outstanding school: Rowan Park School

Sterrix Lane, Litherland, Liverpool, Merseyside L21 0DB

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 July 2024

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. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at Rowan Park. Their complex, individual needs are expertly catered for. Pupils, including children in the early years and students in the sixth form, develop warm and supportive relationships with staff and with each other. This creates a caring school community where pupils are happy and they feel safe.

Teachers and staff have high expectations for each pupil. They use specialist resources and approaches to help remove any barriers to pupils' learning and development. Incremental steps of progress are valued and nurtured so that pupils develop confidence, independence and communication skills. These strong foundations support pupils to achieve well in a range of learning areas and subjects.

Typically, pupils benefit from well-trained staff who support their routines as well as their sensory and medical needs. For example, they use tactile resources, sensory stories and designated colour zones to help pupils to regulate their own behaviour and to prepare them for learning.

Pupils' wider development and life skills are central to the curriculum. This helps pupils to develop confidence and ensure that they are well prepared for life beyond school. For example, some pupils act as reading ambassadors, peer mentors and school council representatives. Pupils learn about road safety and, as their independence builds, they learn how to travel on public transport and visit the local shops.

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

The school has designed a broad and ambitious curriculum. The specialist pathways and options are continually reviewed and adapted to ensure that they meet the needs and

interests of pupils. It prepares pupils, including children in the early years and students in the sixth form, well for their future lives.

Pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are effectively assessed so that they access the curriculum at a stage that is appropriate for them. Some pupils access their learning at a pre-formal or semi-formal stage. The knowledge that pupils should learn is clearly identified and broken down within broad areas of learning. There is a strong focus on the development of pupils' numeracy, communication and speech and language skills. Staff make effective use of resources, such as communication aids, so that pupils can develop independence and engage with their own learning. Teachers and staff successfully support pupils to build these small steps of learning, so that they progress and achieve well.

On the high school site, pupils follow a more formal learning pathway and access discrete subjects, including a range of accredited courses and qualifications. The well-thought-out curriculum is flexible so that pupils revisit and build key knowledge regularly in a timely way that supports their needs. As a result, pupils achieve highly.

Teachers and staff have strong expertise related to pupils SEND. They successfully adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet the varied range of pupils' needs and abilities. However, a minority of staff do not receive the support that they need to balance their workload. This affects their well-being and their ability to work collaboratively with the school to focus on their teaching.

Reading is prioritised throughout the school and individualised reading targets support each pupils' learning journey. At a pre-formal stage of learning, pupils, including some children in the early years, develop pre-verbal sounds and listen to songs and stories. When pupils are ready to learn to read, a phonics programme is expertly delivered so that pupils develop more fluency and confidence when reading. In the high school, pupils access an ambitious range of texts as part of their core curriculum and from the school library. On this site, pupils, including students in the sixth form, read with confidence and expression.

The school teaches pupils explicitly how to recognise their own emotions and how they link to positive and negative behaviours. This helps pupils to become more self-regulated and socially adjusted over time.

The school has a strong understanding of the causes and barriers to some pupils attending school regularly. It takes swift and effective action to improve attendance rates and these are successfully increasing over time.

Beyond the academic curriculum, pupils develop their wider skills so that they are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages in their life. The school ensures that pupils develop their social skills and have an awareness of potential risks. For example, pupils understand how to stay safe online. Older pupils learn about relationships and sex education in an age-appropriate way that is also suitable to their stage of development.

Pupils receive strong careers information advice and guidance, linked closely with lessons about life skills and work experience. All pupils who are able to, take part in work experience, for example at a local safari park. Older pupils work in the café that they have set up on the school site.

A committed and skilled body of governors supports and challenges the school well to effectively fulfil their statutory responsibilities, for example with regard to safeguarding and equalities law. However, governors have not done enough to gather and act on the views of all staff. This hinders them from providing the support that some staff need to fulfil their individual roles and responsibilities as effectively as they could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school, including the governing body, has not assessed the impact or effectiveness of its actions to reduce staff's workload. As a result, a few staff do not perceive that the school has considered their workload or well-being as well as it could. The school, including the governing body, should ensure that it listens and responds appropriately to the views of all staff.

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 June 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 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	104983
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	10321255
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	306
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mark Dale
Headteacher	Karen Lynskey
Website	www.rowanpark.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Rowan Park School caters for pupils in three different settings. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The main school site provides education for children in the early years, pupils in key stages 1 to 4 and students in the sixth form. All of these pupils have a range of complex needs, including physical disabilities, medical needs, autism and sensory impairments and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school has a second site, named Rowan Tree, which is an annex of the main site. This caters for pupils aged three to six years old, with similarly complex needs, who do not require medical support.
- The school also provides a high school provision, called Rowan High, on a third site. This is for pupils aged 11 to 19 who have a specific diagnosis of autism.
- The school does not use any alternative providers for pupils.

- 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 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.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication and language, mathematics, English, computer science, personal, social, health and economic education, and understanding the world. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector observed some pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a familiar adult. An inspector also looked at pupils' work from a range of other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. They met with a range of staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. However, inspectors met with pupils from different year groups to gather their views about school life. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.

To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.

Inspection team

Amanda Downing, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Kate Bowker	His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Bentham	His Majesty's Inspector

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