

Inspection of Ripplevale School Rochester

9-13 New Road, Rochester, Kent, Rochester, Kent ME1 1BG

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 December 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this school because they are happy and feel safe. From the minute they join the school, pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans inform the tailored help that they receive. Caring, well-trained staff provide appropriate emotional support for those who need it. Professional relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils know that staff want the very best for them and many pupils told inspectors that they 'love school'.

The school has high expectations for pupils' academic achievement. The school's aspirations are reflected in the qualifications that all pupils strive to complete. Pupils study an appropriate balance of academic and vocational courses. Everyone leaves each stage of their education well prepared for the next.

The school is calm and orderly. Occasionally, some pupils need help moderating their emotions. Expert staff provide this support in a timely manner. Pupils are highly respectful of each other and recognise that some of their peers need extra help. Pupils make the best use of the outdoor space at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Older students in the sixth form relish welcoming customers into the coffee shop and beauty therapy rooms. This helps them learn vital social skills, such as taking responsibility and interacting with customers.

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

Improvements to the school since the last standard inspection are highly evident. This is because of a strong focus on curriculum development. The proprietor carefully targets extra resource, providing valuable expertise and capacity. The school carries out its statutory duties effectively, including compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Staff have a renewed sense of purpose. They support each other and focus on improving outcomes for the pupils who attend the school.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. Important revisions to the curriculum mean that pupils' learning is effective overall, including how pupils' specific needs are met. Pupils in the main school study a bespoke curriculum, tailored to their needs, in line with the national curriculum. In the sixth form, students broaden their studies and choose from a wide range of vocational qualifications according to their strengths and interests.

The school has thought carefully about the knowledge and skills pupils need to learn. Lessons are calm and purposeful. The school has made significant investment in supporting staff to develop strong subject knowledge. In most cases, expert staff present information clearly to pupils. Most teachers check pupils' learning to help identify gaps or misconceptions effectively. This helps pupils remember vital knowledge and skills before moving on. However, in some subjects, checks on pupils' understanding of the curriculum are not as accurate as they could be at times. Staff use a range of strategies to enhance learning for those who need it most. In most cases, well-trained staff lead interventions for pupils who have fallen

behind. The school is aware that some staff need to deepen their expertise further in specialist areas.

The school maintains a strong focus on literacy. Pupils read every day and benefit from a wide range of inspiring texts that they can borrow from the refurbished libraries. Some pupils read aloud to staff, which helps develop their confidence and comprehension. In the sixth form, students value the school's highly personalised approach to supporting their reading fluency and comprehension. The school uses creative methods to hook students' engagement into these sessions.

Attendance is improving. The school promotes positive attendance and works closely with those who need extra encouragement to attend. However, there are still too many pupils who miss school too often. This means that they miss vital opportunities to learn and embed new knowledge and skills. The school's high expectations of behaviour are widely known and understood. Pastoral and academic learning support staff, known as 'PALS', deal effectively with pupils who require guidance with their behaviour. The school's emotional well-being team provides timely interventions and counselling, where needed. Pupils benefit from the support that they receive for their mental health, for example, through contact with the school's therapy dogs.

Pupils' wider personal development is a high priority. All pupils receive timely and age-appropriate relationships and sex education. Sixth-form students benefit from 'life skills lessons' that prepare them well for adulthood. Pupils learn critical personal safety lessons, both online and in-person, for example taking part in valuable road safety lessons. Pupils relish the new opportunities to develop character and leadership skills. Well-planned trips and visits incorporate excellent opportunities for pupils to engage in interests and hobbies in the local community.

The school's renewed focus on developing high-quality careers information, education, advice and guidance since the last standard inspection has been largely successful. Students in the sixth form receive personalised support to secure placements for work experience, which sometimes lead directly to employment opportunities. All pupils receive timely individualised guidance. The school continues to focus on improving this provision even further.

The proprietor maintains effective oversight of the work of the school. Together with leaders, the proprietor accurately identifies the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Dedicated staff are highly positive about the school. They support the vision of the school and feel a sense of pride in their contribution to the improvements made. Parents and carers speak highly of the school. One parent, typical of many, said 'My child is really thriving at this school. They are a nurturing school and make every effort to make adjustments and allowances to suit my child's needs and interests.' The school meets the independent school standards in full.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school protects pupils from harm, both online and offline. All staff are vigilant and understand the importance of their contribution to the comprehensive safeguarding policy. Expert staff manage child protection arrangements diligently. This means that, where required, pupils receive timely and relevant support and help. The school has made several improvements to safeguarding practice, including a change to the procedure for staff to record their concerns.

During the inspection, inspectors found that some staff were not clear about which system to use to record their concerns. The school rectified this during the inspection. Some of the records that the school had made were not as comprehensive or coherent as they could be. Further work is required to ensure that the school follows its own policy of effective record-keeping. These minor issues, however, do not put pupils at risk of potential harm because leaders and staff are vigilant and effective in fulfilling their responsibilities and duties.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- There is variability in the implementation of the intended curriculum, including how well teachers check that pupils have learned and remembered vital knowledge and skills before they move on. This means that, in some subjects, not all pupils are learning the curriculum as well as they could. The school should continue to focus on ensuring consistency of delivery in line with leaders' high aspirations for all pupils.
- Some pupils miss too much school. These pupils miss vital parts of the curriculum and may fall behind in their learning. The school must continue to focus on improving the attendance of all pupils.
- The school has not checked that its own safeguarding policy is applied as robustly and consistently as it could be. As a result, leaders, including directors, are not always clear on the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's safeguarding work. The school must ensure that all staff use and apply the agreed policies and check this practice robustly.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	132097
DfE registration number	887/6006
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10342030
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	69
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cavendish Education Ltd
Chair	Simon Coles
Headteacher	Natalie Christie
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000 to £48,600
Telephone number	01634 812233
Website	www.ripplevaleschool.co.uk
Email address	office@ripplevaleschoolrochester.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 April 2023

Information about this school

- Ripplevale School Rochester is an independent special school that caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder located in Medway. The school currently admits pupils from Medway and Kent local authorities predominantly.
- The school operates from two sites. The 'school' site caters for pupils in key stages 1 to 4. This site is located at 9-13 New Road, Rochester, Kent, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1BG. The 'college' site caters predominantly for students in the sixth form, and those aged 18 to 25. This site is located at 41 New Road, Rochester, Kent, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1DX.
- All pupils attending the school have an EHC plan. Many pupils also have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and speech, language and communication difficulties.
- There have been changes in leadership staffing since the previous inspection. The headteacher took up their post in September 2023.
- The school occupies two different premises, located close to each other on the same road. The 'school' building caters for primary and secondary pupils. The 'college' building caters mainly for post-16 pupils, including those aged 19 to 25.
- The school is governed by a board of directors.
- The school is registered for up to 210 pupils aged between 6 and 25 years of age.
- The school's last standard inspection was in April 2023.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders and teaching and support staff at the school. The lead inspector met with a representative of the proprietor body and the principal, who oversees and supports the headteacher on behalf of the proprietor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English; mathematics; personal, social and health education and creative and performing arts. For each

deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and support staff, spoke to a few pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work. Inspectors also visited other lessons and looked at pupils' work from other subjects.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour on arrival at school and during visits to classrooms and the outside space.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed in Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents. Inspectors considered the views of staff during meetings with them and through the staff survey. Inspectors also considered the views of pupils through observations of their behaviour and through informal discussions with them.
- 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.
- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety). Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school website.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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