



Ratcliffe Special School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113656
LEA Poole
Inspection number 279211
Inspection dates 5 October 2005 to 5 October 2005
Reporting inspector Susan Kara HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	John Nash Drive
School category	Community		Dawlish
Age range of pupils	8 to 16		Devon EX7 9RZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01626 862939
Number on roll	61	Fax number	01626 888101
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	20 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Cherie White

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ratcliffe is a residential special school designated for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties but which now takes pupils with an increasingly complex range of needs. Since the last inspection the number of pupils who board has reduced and the number of day pupils has increased. There are seven girls at the school. Three of the pupils are of mixed heritage; the majority of pupils are of White British origin. All of the pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Many pupils have had serious disruption to their lives, including significant periods where education has been missed. As a result, they arrive having experienced trauma and turbulence in many areas. A high proportion of pupils, approximately one fifth, are in local authority care arrangements, and many have fragmented or extreme family circumstances.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school which gives good value for money. It is a school where the pupils feel secure and where they are given excellent strategies to be able to take a full part in society.

The teaching is good. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is imaginative and the pupils have a good range of options to choose from. Most of the pupils enter the school with low attainment and make good progress academically, socially and emotionally. Some of the more academically able pupils could be challenged to reach higher standards. The school enables the pupils to make excellent progress in their moral and social development; it is less good at ensuring spiritual and cultural awareness. The school is very successful in keeping parents and carers informed about school developments and their daughter or son's progress. The boarding provision is excellent and makes a very significant contribution to the school's success in meeting the government's aims for the 'every child matters' key outcomes of enjoying and achieving, being healthy, staying safe, making a positive contribution to the community and developing the skills for economic well-being.

The headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what it needs to do to improve. The school holds very detailed data on each pupil and on aspects of the curriculum. More of the data needs to be analysed for trends over time so that this can inform planning at a whole-school level. The staff are well led and all of them, whether teaching or boarding staff, work as one team with a strong shared sense of purpose.

Improvement since the last inspection is good. Improvements have been made to the art and design and technology provision. The school has not been able to improve the amount of space available for physical education. The school is successfully managing the change in the nature of the pupils it works with. The pupils joining the school now, have a much more complex range of needs than before and a number of them have a tendency to display violent behaviour. The school's capacity for continued improvement is excellent.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 9

The last inspection report by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, in March 2005 (draft), recognised that, with two minor exceptions, all of the National Minimal Standards were met, and that many exceeded the required level. The two exceptions have been satisfactorily dealt with. The care staff work closely with the teaching staff to form a cohesive team. There are very good procedures in place at the beginning and end of each day to alert staff to any difficulties or successes that may affect the pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The boarding provision is very well organised, efficiently managed and adequately staffed. The accommodation is well maintained, comfortable and welcoming. The pupils report that they feel safe and that it is a happy environment in which to stay. The pupils respect and enjoy using the attractive grounds. The

boarding provision is used flexibly so that day pupils or their parents/carers can request an overnight stay. The day pupils really value this and often request that they are allowed to stay and enjoy what they regard as a benefit. The pupils are successfully encouraged to develop their independence skills, especially the older pupils. For example they are given the opportunity to cook, shop and budget for their own meals and encouraged to keep their rooms tidy. There is a good range of activities available in the evenings, well suited to the age and interests of the pupils. Recently a youth club has been set up in the grounds for Ratcliffe pupils and the school has good plans to extend club membership to young people from the neighbourhood. The pupils are also encouraged to attend appropriate local groups and use the local town facilities.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

- use the pupil progress data and other assessment information to ensure that in lessons there is a closer match of work to the pupils' individual needs
- audit and evaluate the provision for spiritual and cultural education to ensure that it is well taught
- analyse data over time to monitor trends which can then inform whole school planning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils enter the school with attainment that is usually below, or well below that expected for their age. A very small minority are in line with national expectations. The small numbers and the challenging educational backgrounds of many pupils make it inappropriate to judge their attainment against age related national expectations or averages. For example in the 2005 national tests, at the end of Year 9, there was a wide range of results, from above the national average to significantly below it. The school has worked hard to improve the results at Key Stage 4; they are consistently above the national average for schools in similar circumstances. All of the pupils passed at least one GCSE. Most achieved five or more passes.

The school tracks the progress of individual pupils carefully and all of the pupils make good progress. The school does not make enough use of pupil data to inform lesson planning and to challenge the more able pupils to achieve higher standards. Because of this the school is not able to say, with confidence, if this is good enough progress in relation to the pupil's academic starting point.

The pupils make very good progress in dealing with the difficulties they have in controlling their behaviour and their emotions.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The very good provision for moral and social development permeates all the work of the school and this is helped considerably by the positive relationships between the

staff and the pupils. The school has an assembly policy but on a daily basis it does not meet the statutory requirement of an act of worship. Although the assembly had both moral and social aspects there was no spiritual element. There was little evidence in displays or work that preparation for living in a culturally diverse society is a well-planned part of the curriculum.

The boarding and education provision together ensure that the pupils know about and have to adopt healthy lifestyles. The pupils feel safe at school and know how to keep themselves safe. The majority of pupils are keen to learn and in most of the lessons, most of the pupils behaved well. When behaviour was unacceptable it was dealt with according to the school procedures.

The pupils were polite when talking to inspectors and were both proud and positive about their school. They were able to explain clearly the school's 'traffic lights' system for promoting good behaviour, which they understand and respect.

Many pupils report that they enjoy coming to school and recognise that the staff give them every opportunity to do well. The school council is strong and the pupils feel their voice is heard. It is well run and the pupils understand the democratic process they are a part of. They are actively consulted on all aspects of school life and have representation at the governing body meetings.

The school has an effective anti-bullying committee, made up of staff and pupils, which has successfully reduced the amount of bullying. It is working to encourage a greater confidence amongst the pupils to always report incidents of bullying. The increased use of closed circuit television cameras has helped the staff to recognise areas where there is the potential for bullying to take place.

Attendance is carefully monitored, with good procedures in place but recorded absence is high because the school has three school 'refusers' on roll. In two cases the pupils' parents are being prosecuted and the third pupil is following a part-time curriculum. The number of exclusions has reduced and is always seen as a last resort after many other strategies have been tried. The school has very good pupil level data on attendance and exclusions but does not analyse the data to monitor trends.

Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. All of the subjects are taught by specialists. The teaching assistants are generally well deployed and make a good contribution to the pupils' learning. They also effectively support the teachers in encouraging the pupils to meet the school's high expectations of behaviour. In the best lessons the teacher made the learning aims clear to the pupils at the start. At the end of the lesson the teacher checked the pupils' learning. Shared humour was often used to defuse potentially challenging situations and sometimes the teacher sensibly altered their

original plans to meet the changing needs of the group. Many of the lessons could be more carefully planned to meet the individual learning needs and capabilities of the pupils. Often all of the pupils were on the same task even though there was a wide range of ability within the group. Sometimes the pace of learning was too slow for the more able pupils because the teacher was directing their teaching to the pupils at the middle or lower end of the ability range.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The range of subjects taught at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is very good and offers a wide range of options, all of which are accredited. The school has responded very well to the pupils' interests and through effective links with local further education providers is able to meet individual needs. There is a very good outdoor education programme.

The development of the pupils' personal and social skills and the importance of living safe and healthy lives are amongst the key aims of the school. They are emphasised in all aspects of the school's work. The planned programme for personal, social and health and citizenship education is supported very well throughout the school day. The school draws on an extensive list of outside agencies to support them in their work and makes good use of complementary therapies such as massage. The school works closely with the youth intervention officer. He is supporting the school in developing a system that involves all of the staff and the pupils using a common language to talk about rights and responsibilities and how to put things right when you have wronged someone.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This aspect of the school is outstanding and is a major strength. A key outcome of the high quality of care, guidance and support is that pupils are helped to make much better progress in their learning than was the case in their previous schools. A small number of pupils make such good progress in both their personal and social development and in their learning that they successfully return to mainstream schools.

The pupils relate well to and trust the very dedicated team of education and care staff. The staff know the pupils well and have high expectations of their behaviour and expect them to take responsibility for their actions. There is a common approach to dealing with the pupils, which adds to the pupils' sense of security as they know that the staff are one team. There is a high staff presence around the school at all times which is not intrusive; additional staff can be called on immediately, and may be from the care or teaching staff. The mutual respect of these two groups of staff is reflected in the pupils' equal respect for them. The links to the careers service are very good and last year all of the Year 11 pupils left with places at college or on a training scheme.

The school's procedures for health and safety are very well established. Risk assessments are in place for each pupil and every situation. There are very detailed and clear records of physical intervention. The school has been prompted to look for training and guidance on dealing with more overtly violent behaviour as the needs of the pupils entering the school have become more complex. Grade: 1

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is providing very good leadership and management. She knows the school well and knows what needs to be done to improve it. She is well supported by a strong senior management team. All of the staff share a common vision for the school and work very well together. The school is very good at recording pupil level data but it needs to think more carefully about analysing trends and what they tell them about the school.

The school's self-evaluation was at a draft stage, as consultation with governors and pupils is still to take place. The self-evaluation is good overall but it has too much description in proportion to evaluation. It was also too modest in the judgements relating to the pupils' well-being and their care.

The school involves parents very closely in all aspects of its work and keeps parents particularly well informed about their daughter or son's progress often on a daily or weekly basis. The school has the confidence of parents and the responses in the parents' questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive.

The school improvement plan is satisfactory. Improvements are described under three main headings that sensibly match the governing body committees. However, insufficient focus is given to raising standards and the rate at which pupils progress academically. Many of the success criteria are too vague and are not related to pupil outcomes.

The headteacher has led the school's work on the 'every child matters' key outcomes of enjoying and achieving, being healthy, staying safe, making a positive contribution to the community and developing the skills for economic well-being, extremely well. She has ensured that the school is more outward looking and established good relationships with all the local schools through the local learning group. Opportunities are actively sought to display the pupils' work in the area and this has done much to raise the profile of the school.

Observations of teaching are carried out for performance management purposes. However, the monitoring of teaching also needs to be carried out separately and more rigorously to raise the quality of teaching.

Governance is very good. The chair of the governors is very supportive and makes regular and frequent visits to the school. The vice chair of governors is very knowledgeable and understands the role of governors well. There is a very constructive relationship between the chair and vice chair of the governing body and the

headteacher and senior management team. There are no vacancies on the governing body.

Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Ratcliffe School John Nash Drive Dawlish Devon EX7 9RZ

6 October 2005

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for the way you welcomed us into your school on Wednesday and Thursday, 5 and 6 of October 2005. We really appreciated the way you answered our questions, explained things to us and helped us to find the right rooms. We are only sorry that we were unable to take up your offer to join you for tea on Wednesday. This letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

We think that Ratcliffe is a good school and is likely to become even better.

What we liked most about your school

the school and boarding staff work together as one team to give you as much help and support as they can; this makes the school a happy and safe place to be

you told us that, "most pupils in the school want to learn and the staff give us every opportunity to do well"

the school council gives you the chance to share your ideas and opinions and you have been successful in changing some of the ways the school does things. The chair of the council attends governors meetings to put forward your ideas and views

because of the good teaching in your lessons you are making progress with your work and learning to control your behaviour. We know some of you find this quite difficult at times

there is a wide choice of subjects available, particularly for the senior pupils. If there is something you really want to do the school will try to find a way to organise it

your headteacher knows what needs to be done to make the school even better in the future. All the staff and governors are working with her to make sure this happens.

What we have asked your school to do now

we want your teachers to look closely at any test results and at your work to make sure that everyone is taught at the right level to match their ability

we have asked the school to look again at how you are taught about other peoples' way of life, their beliefs and what makes people different

we want the staff to look at all the information they hold on the school and its pupils and use it to decide how things are improving or declining. This will help the headteacher, governors and staff to plan for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs S Kara HMI and Mrs P Robins HMI