



Rivermead School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134150
LEA Medway
Inspection number 282469
Inspection dates 25 April 2006 to 25 April 2006
Reporting inspector Heather Yaxley HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Forge Lane
School category	Community		Gillingham
Age range of pupils	4 to 16		Kent ME7 1UG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01634 338348
Number on roll	62	Fax number	01634 338347
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Ian Chapel
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs Susan Rogers

Age group 4 to 16	Inspection dates 25 April 2006 - 25 April 2006	Inspection number 282469
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Rivermead is a hospital school that opened in September 2003. The school has a split site which includes the hospital schoolroom at Medway Hospital and the Forge Lane site. Most learners attend the Forge Lane site. In addition, Rivermead provides tuition in learners' homes when they are unable to attend at either site. Learners are referred to Rivermead by their home school. Numbers on roll vary throughout the year according to admissions and those that return to their home school. The hospital schoolroom may have up to 15 learners at any one time and approximately 10 others will receive tuition at home. For the academic year 2004 to 2005, 82 learners accessed the Forge Lane site, an additional 17 had home tuition and 195 attended the hospital schoolroom. Staff working at the hospital and in home tuition also work within the Forge Lane site.

Although Rivermead is designated as a school with an age range of 4-16 years, the majority of medium- and long-term placements are from the secondary age range. Most learners at the Forge Lane site have been placed at Rivermead because of emotional needs. Placements at the school can be short, medium or long term according to need. A significant number of learners have spent long periods out of school prior to admission.

The school's stated mission is to 'realise the potential of all within Rivermead by fostering individual growth and learning'. The school regards reintegration as the goal for all and learners remain on roll at their home school. Learners represent the full range of abilities and social groups and a higher than average proportion are socially disadvantaged, coming from families in challenging circumstances. Almost all learners have White British heritage. Fourteen learners either have a statement of special educational need or are in the process of assessment.

Students attending Rivermead refer to themselves as 'learners' and this will be the term used throughout this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Rivermead is a good school that makes a significant contribution to the well-being of learners with complex emotional and medical needs. The school is very well thought of by learners and their families and has outstanding partnerships with others who support them. The progress that learners make in their academic and personal skills is good in relation to their starting points. This is as a result of good provision that engages learners and is flexible in meeting their individual needs. The tracking of their progress needs to be improved as it does not currently use assessment information thoroughly enough to inform teachers and learners about how well they are doing. Learners have individual plans but these need to be revised so as to involve learners fully in self-review and setting targets.

The school's evaluation of its own performance is accurate. Good progress has been made in developing the quality of provision since the school opened in 2003 and this, together with the good leadership and management by staff and the governing body, suggests that the school will improve further. Good value for money is achieved through a focus on good quality resources and an appropriate staffing that supports the range of provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve the use of assessment to support the tracking of progress, to inform learners about how well they are doing and how to improve further
- improve individual learning plans so that they have more impact on progress and are user-friendly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Learners make good progress. This is because of the good support that they get from staff for their learning and personal development. Staff have high expectations that learners will succeed and this affects the way that learners view themselves and their potential to do well. As one learner said, 'staff expect me to get better grades here'. When learners first come to Rivermead, their levels of academic success are often well below those that would be expected for their age. Previous learning and successes are sometimes hard to assess and may have been affected by poor attendance, poor health and emotional difficulties. By the end of Years 9 and 11, learners make good progress from their low starting points although they reach low standards in relation to national expectations. For the past two years, all have left school with at least one public examination pass. At the end of Year 11 in 2005, there were 18 learners; 16 achieved at least one pass at GCSE and seven achieved at least five passes. For some learners, this represents very good achievement because courses were completed in a year. The school tracks achievement sufficiently to show progress and sets targets that are very challenging but achievement is not tracked closely enough to gain full information about factors that affect different rates of progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners at Rivermead are making good progress in their personal development. They are keen to talk about how very much they enjoy being at school. They show good behaviour and contribute well to the positive learning ethos of the school. At breakfast and at lunchtimes, they show that they are able to regulate their own behaviour, showing care and respect for one another. Older learners are good role models for the younger ones and consequently the overall culture is one of a safe, calm and protective environment. Some have been trained to act as Peer Mentors. Learners are confident and very positive about the opportunities available to them. They say that the preparation for life beyond Rivermead is good, and inspectors agree. The presentation of attendance information makes progress difficult to ascertain but overall attendance is satisfactory, with some individuals attending well in relation to previously long periods out of school. Learners know about healthy lifestyles but not all adopt them, as was seen during lunch. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good with strengths in social and moral development as seen through the activities of the School Council, co-operative attitudes throughout the school and a lack of bullying.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning are good because staff know the learners very well and use this information sensitively to challenge responses to extend thinking. This was seen in a lesson where individuals were successfully encouraged to improve their pizza box design. In another lesson, learners were encouraged to think about their emotional responses to examinations as well as to improving their answers to the questions. Teachers and support staff present a range of activities that can quickly engage learners. Resources are used well to encourage independent and group working as well as developing skills. This includes the use of computers. Learners are not always given sufficient opportunities to assess their own work or assess what it is that will enable them to achieve more. This is linked to a lack of consistency in the use of individual targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum at Rivermead is good and valued by learners. This is because it is flexible to meet the needs of individuals and the demands of a mainstream curriculum. There are very definite attempts to make opportunities relevant and interesting to the learner, supporting the overall aim of reintegration into the home school or further education. A wide range of opportunities are available to learners in Years 10 and 11. Work-related experiences are available to all, with exceptional provision being deployed where specific needs are hard to meet. Collaboration with external agencies to ensure

integration and curriculum coverage is good and improving. An example of this is the link with a local school to increase curriculum coverage and choice from next September. Curriculum programmes in Years 7, 8 and 9 for information and communication technology and religious education are satisfactory. Rivermead is part of the Healthy Schools initiative and this is used effectively within the curriculum to support life skills. Opportunities for additional curricular activities are very limited. The curriculum for learners at home and at the hospital is under review and generally works in tandem with the home school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care is good because of the time and thought given by staff in considering the most appropriate course of action to support individual learners. This is driven by a clear focus on the vision for all to make good progress in their learning as well as preparation for integration. Individual needs are identified early and accurately. Learners say that they feel very involved in their learning and find information they are given invaluable. They are very appreciative of the support that they have from staff during periods of illness or 'set-back', knowing that they are understood and that they have people in school to talk to. One learner commented, 'this is not like an ordinary school; here people treat you as a person'. Another said, 'they make you feel more confident and you really achieve well here'. Questionnaires show that family members support these views very strongly. Suitable procedures are in place to ensure that learners are safe at Rivermead.

There is currently a lack of involvement by learners in setting and reviewing targets linked to individual education plans. These plans have been under review for some time. They are not yet supporting individuals sufficiently in their own learning because they are not part of a clear process for self-assessment and are not written in appropriate language with targets that can be used to track progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and strongly support integration and achievement. Senior managers and governors are highly focused on developing a strong learning ethos. They have had a clear vision from the school's beginning in 2003 and continue to use the good knowledge that they have about strengths and weaknesses to move the school forward. Particular strengths are in knowing when to take action for maximum effect and building staff skills through carefully planned professional development. Evaluation of provision and performance is accurate and used effectively to generate professional dialogue, collaboration and ownership of actions. The school involves all staff, parents and carers when it reviews its effectiveness and plans to involve support services and other schools more fully in the process in the future. A new management structure is in place to further develop provision as a result of evaluating current practice. The drive and enthusiasm of the headteacher are

significant factors in establishing the new school and these qualities are highly valued by colleagues at Rivermead and other schools. The progress that the school has made since opening and the approaches taken to address some difficult issues throughout the journey show that the school has good capacity to continue to improve.

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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	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	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?	2	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	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	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	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

It was a pleasure to inspect Rivermead School this week. We could see how much you enjoy and appreciate the education that you receive at the school. We recognise that for many of you it is hard to overcome personal difficulties but we believe that you are achieving challenging goals with good support from staff.

We judge Rivermead to be a good school. We took into consideration the comments that you made to us in groups or as individuals. We would also like to thank members of your family who completed the questionnaire. It was good to hear so many good things about Rivermead.

We hope that you will read the full report (it's not too long!) and think about how you can get involved in the things that staff want to do to improve still further. We have asked Mrs Rogers and the staff to look at how to track your progress more closely and to improve individual learning plans so that you can be more involved in knowing how you are doing and how to do even better.

We wish you well in all that you want to achieve for yourselves in the future.