

**Inspection report**  
**Ripplevale School**  
**Independent special school**  
**DfES ref no: 886/6047**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 13 - 16 November 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

### **Information about the school**

Ripplevale School is situated on a large estate on the edge of Ripple, a village close to Deal in Kent. It is owned by the Ripplevale School Company's directors. The school admits up to 43 boys aged from 9 to 16 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are currently 26 boys aged 11 to 16 on roll. Many have additional problems, such as autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. All pupils have statements of their special educational needs maintained by their local authorities. Eleven pupils board from Monday to Friday, and the remainder live at home and attend school daily. All pupils have experienced a very disrupted education as a result of their difficulties, and their attainment on entry to the school is well below average, particularly in reading, writing, communication and social skills.

Ripplevale's mission statement is to '*maximise the potential of all.*'

### **Summary of main findings**

Ripplevale School provides well for its pupils. Although judged to be a good school at its last inspection in 2001, the directors recognise that it went into a steep decline in the following years. A new principal and leadership team have worked very hard and improved all aspects of the school's work systematically and steadily. The quality of education and care provided is now much improved. Pupils make good progress because the curriculum is good, their personal development is good and their behaviour much improved. The ethos and climate for learning have been enhanced by the refurbished accommodation and improved resources. New assessment systems are effective and are being used increasingly well to plan work that matches pupils' needs although the analysis and use of such data could be more focused. In the round, teaching is satisfactory with good features. Some inconsistencies in its quality remain because of the uneven application of the school's new systems. It is, however, improving due to effective monitoring and support. As a result, pupils are much better disposed to working and learning than in the past, and their achievement is shown in improving test and examination results. The school works effectively to ensure pupils stay safe and healthy, enjoy school and achieve well, make a contribution back to their local and wider communities and become equipped for their own economic well-being. There is still further to go.

### **What the school does well:**

- it successfully implements a thorough, well-devised and relevant programme of school improvement which is having a good effect on all aspects of its work;
- it provides well for pupils' personal development and academic achievement and they make good progress;
- it facilitates good team work and communication between the whole staff team to the benefit of the pupils;
- it cares for and safeguards its pupils very effectively; and
- it provides very well for curriculum enrichment activities and for work-related learning for the older pupils.

### **What must the school do in order to comply with the regulations?**

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

### **Next Steps**

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve classroom information and communication technology (ICT) resources for teaching and learning;
- monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching more systematically to help address weaknesses;
- develop the analysis and use of information gained from the assessment of pupils' learning to support planning for individual pupils and for school improvement;

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

## **1. The quality of education provided by the school**

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The curriculum is good. It is well planned to be relevant and challenging and gives good opportunities for pupils of all abilities to make progress. All pupils gain some accreditation at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Entry Level at the end of Year 11. The curriculum successfully prepares pupils for adult life and the next stage of their education and ultimately for their employment and economic well-being. There is a suitable emphasis on personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Helping pupils learn to stay safe and to make healthy choices are given high priority. A good steer is given to the curriculum by the head of education, which has helped bring it to its currently strong position.

Pupils enter the school with a low level of literacy skills. A whole-school literacy programme with short daily lessons in addition to timetabled English lessons gives good support to pupils of all abilities. It helps to motivate pupils and to instil or renew confidence in themselves, and so their involvement in the whole educational process improves. This practice has successfully addressed a key issue for improvement arising from the last inspection. The use of ICT was also an issue, and it is beginning to be used more effectively to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. However, its use is affected by limited classroom resources.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects based on the National Curriculum in Years 7 to 9, with the exception of music, which is not currently taught. German is taught as a modern foreign language. Some pupils in Years 7 and 8 are taught in a 'nurture' class which successfully supports them as they arrive at the school with their varied and often negative attitudes to education. Pupils develop better attitudes to learning as a result of their growing success in this more protected environment.

In Years 9 to 11 pupils study a range of subjects, including those leading to GCSE and Entry Level qualifications. An alternative curriculum for lower attaining Year 10 and 11 pupils, the National Skills Profile, has just been introduced. This provides more appropriate accredited learning for these pupils. Good support is given by the local careers service from Year 9 onwards, and by the Connexions service adviser who supports work experience and college placements for pupils after they leave school. Pupils in Year 10 enjoy their work experience placements and are praised by their employers in feedback to the school. Year 11 pupils attend a weekly course in car mechanics at the local college of further education which prepares them well for future learning and adult life.

A number of additional activities enrich the curriculum very effectively. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and there are good links with the local police and the Youth Offending Team which help pupils understand social and democratic structures and the value of an active and positive contribution to the community. Visiting speakers give good support to the PSHCE programme. An excellent link has been established with a premier league football club which provides weekly soccer coaching sessions for all pupils, much to their delight. A

variety of sports, including soccer and rugby, are played and there are competitive matches with other similar schools. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 recently attended an army careers day and joined in many physical activities successfully. Pupils who board have an additional range of activities during the evenings, including swimming, skiing and ice-skating. Pupils particularly enjoy sporting activities and the range provided helps them to establish healthy lifestyles.

The length of the school day is shorter than recommended and the school teaching year is also short. This is recognised in the school improvement plan where action is proposed to extend the teaching day by fifteen minutes by Easter 2007.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Although it is good or better in around half the lessons, the remainder is less effective and there is some unsatisfactory teaching. Nevertheless, pupils' work, the Year 9 national test results and the qualifications gained in Year 11 show that pupils make good academic progress over time. This is due to the positive effect the school has on their behaviour and attitudes to work, combined with the steadily improving quality of teaching, assessment and the curriculum. A key objective in the school improvement plan is the development of more systematic monitoring to further improve the quality of teaching; this is an appropriate aim. However, some inconsistencies in teaching practice are being addressed by effective monitoring and support by the head of education. This has resulted in, for example, greatly improved marking and the introduction of a very good lesson planning pro-forma.

Several features characterise the most effective lessons. In particular, teachers engage pupils' interest immediately so that disruptive behaviours are minimised. This is achieved in several ways: for example, by the strong personality of the teacher, who talks to pupils in a way they enjoy and respond to, as seen in a lesson for younger pupils on drugs awareness; by presenting the lesson objectives as an exciting challenge and then maintaining a brisk pace with varied activities throughout the lesson, as observed in GSCE English lessons; or by good use of the computer projector to focus pupils' attention. In general, however, ICT is under-used to support teaching and learning. Other subject resources and their use are satisfactory.

When pupils' interest is not engaged, disruptive behaviour occurs quickly. The lesson does not recover and consequently, insufficient learning takes place. Nevertheless, relationships are very good in most lessons. The staff generally have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and their commitment to working and learning, and pupils usually meet them. Any behavioural issues are smoothly and effectively managed by the school's agreed procedures. The best lessons are based firmly on the planned curriculum and teachers have good knowledge of pupils' abilities and what they need to learn next, and so tailor the work and questioning accordingly. The development of pupils' speaking, listening and social skills is given high priority and teaching assistants work quietly and effectively in support of both teaching and learning. This is particularly evident in the 'nurture' group. In less effective lessons, work is not well matched to pupils' needs, and priority is given to carrying out the activities rather than ensuring that pupils are learning.

Good systems for assessment have been developed recently, although full use is not yet made of the information gained. The school improvement plan indicates appropriately that analysis of assessment data to inform school developments and support for individuals' learning are key priorities. Pupils' achievements in the subjects of the National Curriculum are assessed by reference to the national level descriptors, although work still has to be done on ensuring that staff use them consistently to ensure accuracy. Diagnostic age-related testing of pupils' skills in reading, spelling and writing are completed regularly to help identify areas for particular support. Each pupil has an individual education plan (IEP) which outlines targets in personal development, behaviour and literacy, and in addition, two targets are identified for pupils' daily 'credit' slips. This effectively helps pupils to become involved in assessing their own learning and behaviour. Learning objectives are shared with pupils in most lessons, but are not always reviewed at the end to see whether pupils have learned what was intended. Sometimes the objectives are not tailored sufficiently well to each individual's needs. Nevertheless, the assessment data and the staff's informal but detailed knowledge of each pupil's skills, knowledge and understanding enable them to make good progress.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school provides very well for pupils' personal development and they are given the support needed to become responsible members of society. Pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge are specifically developed through the PSHCE curriculum, by the school's family ethos and by systems such as the 'credit' system. Pupils become much better at managing their own behaviour and learn how to deal with given situations. On one occasion, a boy *said 'I've done very well in the last couple of days and have been ignoring him'* (aggravating behaviour.) The school strongly encourages pupils to get on with one another and most lessons include opportunities for group or paired work which contributes to pupils' generally good relationships with one another. Pupils are encouraged to accept responsibility for their learning as far as possible, and most work independently in class. Opportunities are given for pupils to reflect on the greater issues in life, as seen, for example, during a very good assembly on the theme of Women at War, held during Remembrance week.

Pupils' awareness of right and wrong is promoted strongly through the school ethos and through PSHCE lessons. For example, lessons on legal and illegal drugs and the pros and cons of banning smoking in public debated the issues very successfully. Pupils learn to provide for people less fortunate than themselves. Last year, they purchased three sheep and two goats for a village in Africa, and this year are sponsoring a young person through Action Aid. The school works hard to promote the value of a law-abiding society. The close family atmosphere helps pupils feel that they belong to a community for which they are responsible and to which they should contribute. Through this, pupils learn how a democratic society works. The school council is a purposeful body which has made real decisions, for

example about playground equipment. The citizenship curriculum includes a strand on community involvement, and the new National Skills Profile course includes units of work on community working and facilities. Pupils' cultural development is less pronounced than the other aspects of their personal development. Understanding of traditional British culture is supported by extra-curricular activities and visits from local artists and musicians. Pupils' understanding of diversity and difference is promoted through assemblies and lessons such as history and religious education, but overall their multi-cultural awareness is less advanced.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The school provides a safe and protective environment. There are up-to-date policies and practices for all aspects of pupils' protection, welfare and safety, and robust systems are in place for safeguarding them. Staff training on all relevant matters, such as First Aid, child protection and positive handling is held regularly. All health and safety requirements are met. The designated health and safety officer reports to a committee which meets regularly to review procedures and to monitor risk assessments. The school has a number of staff who are qualified in First Aid. Pupils and staff are fully aware of the clearly defined policy and procedures regarding bullying, and pupils state that this helps to reduce incidents and makes them feel safer in school. The behaviour management policy is effective and is underpinned by the successful system of credits that pupils earn for positive behaviour, attitudes and achievement.

The residential care staff work routinely alongside teachers and teaching assistants in the classrooms. This ensures very good liaison, communication and cohesion between the whole staff team. The practice brings additional support and security to the pupils, builds relationships and successfully addresses their individual education, social and emotional needs. The education and family liaison officer provides very good support to pupils and to their parents and carers, and ensures that the needs of looked after children are properly met. There are good procedures for meeting pupils' special educational needs. Statements are reviewed annually and IEPs and care plans identify suitable actions to support their behaviour, welfare and learning needs.

The school dining room provides a choice from a menu of well-prepared healthy foods, with fresh fruit and salad always available. Many pupils are aware of the need to make healthy choices at meal times, although they do not always do so in practice. Attendance is good for most pupils. However, there is a high rate of authorised absence. This is mainly due to a few pupils' home circumstances and to exclusions, which are made in line with the school's behaviour management and exclusion policies. The school makes every effort to encourage full attendance.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school carries out comprehensive procedures to ensure that all education and residential staff are suitable for working with children. These procedures are carried out prior to confirmation of any adult's appointment at the school. Procedures include an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and verification of identity and qualifications. The checks are compiled as a single central school record which meets the latest requirements, and procedures are in place to ensure that they are systematically updated.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The premises are suitable for their purpose. The residential accommodation has recently been significantly improved and extensive building maintenance and refurbishment have taken place. This has resulted in a good standard of bedroom, bathroom and day-room facilities for boarders.

The classroom accommodation was criticised at the last inspection. A rolling programme of improvements is not yet complete but has made a very good impact on improving some areas of the school. However, the remaining areas are shabby and ceilings, particularly, show many signs of past water leaks. Classrooms are suitable in size for the small class groups, and where refurbished, are well equipped with new lighting, flooring and furniture. Specialist rooms provide satisfactory accommodation for the subjects, but the design and technology room is in urgent need of updating. Pupils enjoy working in the new ICT suite. The school gymnasium does not have suitable changing or showering facilities and its small size prevents some key activities such as badminton. However, plans are well advanced for improving these facilities.

Outdoor space is good. There is a large, hard-surface play area with some markings for games and a large well-maintained sports field. An area of the school grounds is being converted to provide for the horticulture element of the newly introduced National Skills Profile accredited course.

The school kitchen is fitted to commercial standards. There is an adequate servery and dining area for pupils and staff. The residential accommodation and all classrooms and areas of the school are kept clean, tidy and in a hygienic condition. The procedures for fire safety have been improved so that evacuation points are clearly identified and meet requirements. The school has made appropriate plans to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.



## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school provides an appropriate range of information for parents, pupils and other interested parties. It is presented in three documents, one specifically written for each group, although parents also receive the prospectus. However, the same information is not always found in each document, and the prospectus and parents' handbook, for example, need to be read together to obtain all the necessary information. Nevertheless, together the documents refer to all the relevant policies and practices, for example on admissions, discipline and exclusions and how parents and interested parties can gain access to them. Some of the information is also shown on the school's website which is to be updated shortly.

The school prides itself on maintaining good relationships with parents. They receive regular information from the school and close contact is maintained through the very effective work of the education and family liaison officer. This includes discussions relating to specific incidents should they arise, such as the behaviour leading to an exclusion. Parental responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires confirm parents' satisfaction with the care and education provided by the school. Responses to the pupil questionnaires show that the pupils are also generally happy with all that the school offers them.

Good reports are written on pupils' progress and behaviour in school and in the residence, and form the basis of regular, well-documented progress reviews and planning meetings. Letters written by local authority representatives show their appreciation of the difference the school makes to the lives of the young people in their care, and the information received from the school enables them to make suitable plans for their future.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**

The school has recently revised its complaints policy to more accurately describe its procedures. The policy includes a helpful flow chart which makes the procedural steps very clear and easy to understand. Support to complete the steps of the complaints procedure is offered if required, including translations into other languages. Pupils are made aware of how they can address any dissatisfaction and parents are sent a copy of the policy when their son first starts school. The parents' handbook and prospectus state that the additional copies of the complaints policy are available from the school on request.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Ripplevale School
DfES Number:	886/6047
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	26
Number of boarders:	11
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	26
Annual fees (day pupils):	£25,143
Annual fees (boarders):	£56,835
Address of school:	Chapel Lane Ripple Deal Kent CT14 8JG
Telephone number:	01304 373 866
Fax number:	01304 381 011
Email address:	info@ripplevaleschool.co.uk
Principal:	Mr Ted Schofield
Head of Education:	Mrs Valerie Miller
Proprietors:	Mr Chris Danican and Mr Clifford Davies
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Judith Charlesworth
Date of inspection:	13 - 16 November 2006

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