

Ravensbourne School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102364
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	307983
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	87
6th form	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs P Coles
Headteacher	Mrs M Cameron
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2004
School address	Neave Crescent Faringdon Avenue Harold Hill Romford RM3 8HN
Telephone number	01708 341800
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Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Ravensbourne provides education for students with a wide spectrum of complex needs. Most have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school has a unit for a small number of students diagnosed as autistic. Ravensbourne's post-16 section accepts students with moderate learning difficulties from other provisions. Currently, children in the Foundation Stage total seven, some of whom are present for assessment only. All students require greater support than is readily available in mainstream schools and all have a statement of special educational need or are in the process of assessment.

The majority of pupils are of white British heritage, but just over a third comes from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Boys outnumber girls by two to one and there is an uneven spread of age groups within the school population which fluctuates from year-to-year. A third of students are looked-after children. The proportion eligible for a free school meal is above average. The school serves students from across Havering and the surrounding areas and most are bussed daily to school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parents are unanimous about the success of this outstandingly effective school in providing for its very vulnerable pupils. 'The school is a shining light in the education system,' noted one family. 'It is an amazing school where nothing is ever too much trouble for the staff.'

Ravensbourne provides exceptionally effective care, guidance and support for its pupils. This, together with a curriculum that is very well matched to pupils' individual needs, underpins their outstanding personal and academic progress. Pupils of all ages, and across a wide spectrum of complex learning difficulties and disabilities, make giant strides from when they join the school. Despite sometimes degenerative and distressing medical conditions, pupils markedly improve their communication skills. Many become adept at using signs and symbols to make known their views and understanding of the environment around them. They are confident in making simple choices, engage very well in social situations, around the dinner table, for example, and strive hard to meet their personal targets. Although standards are very low, pupils achieve outstandingly well.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding. Most have a very clear understanding of right from wrong because of the highly effective personal and social training they receive. Pupils know the impact of their actions on others, are able to applaud good efforts and show concern for each other. They greatly enjoy assemblies, making and listening to music, and are looking forward to Easter celebrations. Their medical needs make them aware of health matters and most show a sensible approach to safety. They contribute much to their own community but also to the wider community, particularly through fund raising for charities and through taking part in conservation activities.

Leadership and management are outstanding, including that of the sixth form. The inspirational headteacher and the determined governors have moulded and developed a committed staff who give of their best. Because of close teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants, pupils have never less than good, and often outstanding, classroom experiences. Highlights of teaching include meticulous planning for pupils' individual needs and a relentless check on tiny steps in progress. The school recognises that in order to advance the assessment of learning still further, support assistants require further training. Relentless and reflective self-evaluation has guided excellent improvements since the last inspection. Middle managers, working collaboratively with senior leaders, are now a strong force to drive the school forward. Ravensbourne is set fair to improve even further, despite overstretched resources. The capacity to improve is strong.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students in the small sixth form benefit enormously from the high quality of provision that is exceptionally well led. They make outstanding progress in their personal development and in applying skills in a range of different contexts because of their individually tailored programmes and outstanding care, guidance and support. The transition to further education, training or other institutions is very carefully managed to ensure students' are confident in different settings. Experiences both within and outside the classroom seek to widen students' capabilities in dealing with new and unknown situations. Most follow accredited courses in life skills and make excellent progress in communications, using signs and symbols really well. The rich modular

curriculum is so structured as to allow new students to join the sixth form at any time when they are ready. 'Ravensbourne has brought the best out of my son in four months,' wrote a parent. All students participate well in sport and leisure activities and thoroughly enjoy their contributions to conservation in Epping Forest.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the early years make overall very fast progress. Those who achieve especially well move on to other forms of provision. They make the best progress in their personal, social and emotional development. A number demonstrate excellent achievement in cooperating with each other and with adults. Their progress and performance towards the early learning goals, however, is well below that expected because of the children's severe physical, emotional and learning difficulties. From a very low baseline, nursery children rapidly learn to share, listen to and respond to others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching assistants receive further training in assessing pupils' small steps in learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Records show that pupils come to Ravensbourne with very much lower starting points than those typical for their ages. Learning difficulties and disabilities cover an exceptionally wide spectrum. Students face learning challenges that are often exacerbated by complex and degenerative medical conditions. Nevertheless, although standards are low, students achieve exceptionally well, particularly in gaining independence, in developing communication skills, and in the ability to make personal choices. Parents are unanimous in identifying the excellent progress pupils make. 'Our child has far exceeded all the expectations of the medics and ourselves because of the firm foundation laid by the school,' wrote a parent. Annual reviews of students' progress indicate that they meet well over three quarters of their realistic but challenging targets set in their individual education plans.

By Year 12, students who have completed their education at Ravensbourne successfully tackle selected accredited courses. For example, those who ride horses successfully gain certificates in horse care. Others reach entry level qualifications in life skills. Those joining from other institutions at age 16 initially achieve best in the areas of behaviour, confidence, social and practical skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development of the students is outstanding. Pupils know that the adults around them genuinely care for them and they form happy trusting relationships that underpin their sense of security. Despite a high level of medical appointments and lengthy journeys, pupils attend regularly where possible and really enjoy the broad range of engaging activities. Parents

report that there is no reluctance over coming to school. Behaviour is good and students show remarkable tolerance for each other, including for those who sometimes show distress, restlessness or aggression because of medical conditions. Pupils socialise very well over the pleasant, communal lunch tables.

Pupils of all ages participate as well as they can in physical exercise. Swimming is a clear favourite with all enjoying the school's pool at least once a week. Other individualised sports are also popular with students, particularly golf, led by a parent, and dance. Some gain real satisfaction from their horse-riding activities. Pupils are generally pleased with the healthy meals and snacks, the daily fruit for younger children, and the ready access to water throughout the day.

Pupils' contributions to the school community are good. As far as they can, pupils try to help in simple tasks such as taking charge of registers on the journey to the school office. Older pupils contribute to the enjoyment of others in music through supporting their singing. They frequently raise funds to support charities both at home and abroad. Students in Years 10 and 11 undertake recycling duties. Others make and sell soup to their peers and help with simple office tasks. These activities help prepare the few who are likely to enter employment but support the many in learning life skills. The majority also make the best possible progress towards their future economic well-being through making independent choices in a range of activities and through excursions to local shops and community projects. Post-16 students strengthen their communication skills and undertake work experience within the school, consolidating their understanding of what it means to be an adult.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Consistently good teaching with some outstanding aspects characterises lessons. Careful planning for individual needs is at the heart of the pupils' success in learning despite the barriers posed by medical conditions, learning difficulties and other emotional, social and behavioural challenges. Teachers plan exceptionally well to use the good level of support from adults other than teachers in the classroom. They constantly model and demonstrate skilful techniques for teaching assistants to help pupils learn, coordinate movements, and communicate choices. However, because of the necessarily one-to-one learning assistance needed, the expertise afforded pupils varies, depending on the experience of teaching assistants. The school has rightly recognised that further training to develop support assistants' skills is a priority.

Warm working relationships are reflected in the pupils' confidence in their teachers, be it in managing their physical movement or in moving them another step forward in their learning. This helps pupils to engage purposefully in their learning. Teachers and support staff are adept at managing students' behaviour and at providing just the right amount of support so as not to stifle independence. Very good teamwork among adults shows pupils how to relate to each other. In a dance and drama lesson, for example, post-16 students volunteered to lead parts of the road safety activity and to evaluate constructively the performances of their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Excellent progress has been made in developing the curriculum since the last inspection. A particular strength is the way in which the school personalises students' programmes as far as possible. At the same time, the Ravensbourne curriculum parallels the mainstream curriculum wherever possible. Communication skills and personal, health and social skills are strong threads linking much of the work, often through the creative use of information and communication resources. Off-site visits to places of interest, sensory activities and participation in community projects are integrated into daily timetables. These are balanced well against literacy and numeracy tasks that extend pupils' learning. Exceptional opportunities for physical education, from horse riding to golf, do much to encourage pupils' confidence and the development of their thinking and motor skills. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from a well-structured day that helps develop attention and work habits. The post-16 curriculum prepares students well for eventual moves to college or other institutions. There is a strong focus on independence in daily living and in safety.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are exceptionally robust and risk assessments are in place for all. The on-site medical support through the nursing team, the high ratio of adults to pupils, and the careful attention to site security, ensure the pupils' safety without hampering their independence. A parent commented, 'I never have to worry about my daughter's care.' Incident and accident records are regularly monitored and updated.

Along with high quality medical assessments, care and constant one-to-one adult support, baseline information on learning stages is used rigorously. The staff analyse pupils' academic progress assiduously and are imaginative in adapting systems that allow for detailed progress checks on each pupil. Teachers, and to some extent support assistants, record meticulously the tiny steps forward that pupils make. Links with external agencies to support, not only pupils, but their families, are also excellent. The school is a determined advocate for its pupils and strives to ensure they receive all possible help. The wide-spread site is well maintained to provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment as well as to support mobility for all pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher, very well supported by the deputy headteacher, is reflected in the shared vision and common sense of purpose among all staff. They daily demonstrate the school's vision: 'to give Value and be Valued'.

There have been significant improvements since the last inspection in the coordination of many aspects of the school's work, particularly in the curriculum and timetabling. New and self-funded

accommodation for pupils with autism is far better suited to their needs than previously. Committed middle leaders now work closely together and take the lead in ensuring progression and inclusion for all. The governing body, although under-strength, plays a valuable part in seeking financial support for the school, in improving the environment and in challenging the school's leadership to maintain progress. Exemplary teamwork underpins much of the current smooth running of the school and the very high quality of care. The rapid pace of improvement since the last inspection demonstrates strong capacity to improve further and to sustain the school's inclusive ethos of which it is rightly proud.

Self-evaluation at senior level and by governors is rigorous, albeit modest, reflecting the high expectations of the staff. Systematic monitoring and a regular cycle of reflection and analysis of strengths and areas for improvement inform the school's development plan very well. Well-designed professional development supports teachers and other staff but the school recognises that in order to improve classroom practice even further, additional training activities for teaching assistants, in particular those with less experience, are a next step.

Parents feel fully involved in the life of the school through formal reviews, home-school books, regular telephone communications and meetings. Many parents commented that they feel they '...have the support of all teachers and staff who will always alert them to any problem.' Pupils also communicate their views through the much enjoyed tea party with the headteacher. Senior pupils were happy to express how much they liked school on one such occasion during the inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Ravensbourne School, Romford, RM3 8HN

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly to Ravensbourne. I really enjoyed sharing time with you and seeing how much you like your school. I know that you and your parents appreciate greatly how well staff look after you.

I know by your happy faces that you agree with me that Ravensbourne is an excellent school. Your parents certainly think so. You are learning very well because your teachers and helpers make sure the work is just right for you. They use lots of interesting activities to help you understand. All of you are making excellent progress in signing, in listening to each other, and in enjoying each other's company. The tea party with the headteacher is one of your favourites and you are able to tell her what you think of school. I was very pleased to see how well you managed lunchtime, chose your menus, and kept each other company.

You attend as well as you can, behave well, and are encouraged to do as much for yourselves as possible. In the 'FE', you are managing your money, shopping and cooking very efficiently. You are cooperating well with each other and your teachers.

You have an exceptional headteacher who is very well supported by staff and governors. They are working tirelessly on your behalf to make sure you get the best possible education the school can provide. Because you are learning all the time, your school agrees with me that your support assistants could help you learn even more if they had some extra training.

I hope you, your parents and the school will continue to work together to do the best for you. I am sure you will continue to be kind to each other and help others where you can.

Have a happy Easter and enjoy the assembly with all the ideas you have contributed.

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector