

Ravenswood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109407
Local Authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	309970
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	85
6th form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Neal
Headteacher	Philippa Clark
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
School address	Pound Lane Nailsea BS48 2NN
Telephone number	01275 854134
Fax number	01275 810876

Age group	4–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ravenswood School admits pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Just under half of these identify autism as the primary learning difficulty and a similar number point to severe learning difficulty. The vast majority of the remaining pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Most pupils live in North Somerset although a significant minority travel from other local authorities. Virtually all pupils have a White British background and boys outnumber girls by two to one. Although the school is able to admit children of pre-school age, very few enter before their fifth birthday. There were no children in Reception at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ravenswood is a satisfactory school with good provision for its post-16 students. Despite many members of the leadership team being relatively new to their posts, they have identified what is required to move the school forward. They have begun to implement change, but this is at an early stage of having an impact on the academic and personal development of all pupils and students. However, they have a good capacity to make further change with the support of an effective governing body.

A concerted effort by senior leaders to raise the overall quality of classroom practice is beginning to have an effect, although teaching and learning remain satisfactory overall. The pace of learning is at times reduced when teachers do not manage time well and when they miss opportunities of using information and communication technology (ICT) and alternative methods of communication as effectively as they could. This in turn reduces the rate of pupils' progress and the extent of their achievements. Nevertheless, pupils make adequate progress, although standards are inevitably very low, given pupils' often severe learning difficulties. Some pupils make good progress and achieve well. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum, although limitations of the premises have an adverse effect on the curriculum available for some pupils. Pupils' personal development is good overall and outstanding in some aspects. Pupils confirm that they love going to school. Their attendance is excellent and their attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. However, accommodation shortcomings restrict the school's ability to fully exploit opportunities for promoting pupils' personal development, and there are elements of potential hazards associated with some of these deficiencies. It is these accommodation shortcomings that prevent the provision for pupils' care, guidance and support from being outstanding.

The school has forged strong links with its partners. Parents, local colleges, other education providers and colleagues from many agencies work well together and with the school to support and to extend pupils' learning and personal development experiences. The headteacher provides strong leadership. She has been instrumental in establishing a team that shares her aspirations for the school. Members of this leadership team are now developing the skills to carry out effective monitoring and the expertise to evaluate findings in ways that drive forward school improvement through more effective target setting. However, these procedures are yet to be embedded and so, for example, data are not interrogated to a depth that enables the school to really focus in on the finer details that the information contains. This reduces leaders' ability to have a complete and in-depth picture of all pupils' progress and achievements. This is compounded by the absence of historical data that can be used to make informed judgements of pupils' progress over time.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Effectively planned and structured provision prepares students well for leaving school. For the last three years, all leavers have gone on to a further education course. This transition is successful because students receive an education that balances accredited courses, appropriate to their age and ability, with work-related learning and the development of life skills. Students follow a wide range of courses and formal recognition of their work gives them a sense of pride and achievement. Links with organisations such as the Brandon Trust provide vocational education, and students get opportunities to practise in real-life situations what they have

learned in class during work experience and visits into the community. As a result, they develop into sensible and mature young people with a responsible attitude to learning. In the words of one parent, her son will leave school as a 'polite, confident, sociable young man with a very positive future ahead of him'. This is evident in the classroom, where students learn well and make good progress because they are enthusiastic learners who respond to good teaching by working hard. They follow routines quickly and listen to adults and to each other respectfully. Although students make great strides in their personal development, features of the accommodation reduce the possibilities for this to be even greater. For instance, they do not have the use of a common room that would enable them to rehearse life skills and to socialise in a less formal environment.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 0

At the time of the inspection, no children were taught as part of the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with the local authority to improve the accommodation and premises to better meet the learning and personal development needs of all pupils.
- Develop a clear rationale to measure all pupils' progress over time and to evaluate their achievements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through teachers' consistent use of ICT and alternative methods of communication, and a more efficient use of time.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are significantly below those expected of pupils of similar age because of the severe and complex nature of pupils' learning difficulties. Overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily. A minority make better progress than anticipated in acquiring key literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, whereas a small proportion of pupils do not make the progress that might be expected. In some cases, this is because pupils' medical conditions or mental health problems prevent effective learning and this restricts their ability to make progress. In other cases, such as secondary aged pupils with autism, their pace of learning has been slow in the past. As senior leaders focus increasingly on raising the quality of learning across the school, teaching is improving and this is beginning to have an impact on removing such pockets of underachievement. Other developments are also beginning to have an impact on raising pupils' achievements. Recent changes have resulted in senior staff being given responsibilities for overseeing personalised learning programmes and for ensuring that learning activities link more closely, to what pupils have already achieved.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils have very positive views about their school. They make impressive progress in their personal development as they move through the school. One parent described how 'each year has seen my son grow in confidence'. Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations. As a result, they take increasing responsibility for their own learning, working both independently and cooperatively. This prepares them well for leaving school, as does the work-related programme followed by pupils in Years 10 and 11. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a safe and healthy lifestyle. They confirm that they thoroughly enjoy physical exercise and know that this, and a healthy diet, helps them to stay fit. Pupils make good contributions to both the school and local communities. Older pupils and students support younger ones at lunchtimes and in assembly, and they support local charities, such as making benches with the Avon Woodlands Trust. Pupils make excellent progress in their moral and spiritual development, with many opportunities to consider the needs of others and to reflect on situations. Their social development is good, but the accommodation reduces opportunities for this to be promoted fully. For instance, the size of the dining room prevents all pupils eating together; those with a packed lunch have to eat in classrooms. Outside play areas are limited in size, short of resources, and there are no organised activities to encourage play during breaks. As a result, many pupils do not become involved in activities by being encouraged to engage in social interactions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Lesson activities promote learning satisfactorily because there is variation in the quality of teaching across the school, although none is inadequate. Post-16 students are taught well; high expectations and challenging work promote effective learning. Throughout the school, relationships are consistently high and teachers generally manage their pupils' behaviour successfully and with minimum fuss. Teachers have adequate knowledge of the subjects that they teach and a clear understanding of what they expect their pupils to learn. They always try to share these aims with the pupils, but this is always done using text, even in those cases where pupils do not have the communication skills to read it. This is symptomatic of an inconsistent approach to alternative communication strategies. While there is a stated commitment to the principle of removing communication difficulties as a barrier to learning, this is not routinely reflected in practice. Staff seek to involve all pupils in whole-class teaching and this reflects their commitment to inclusion and a wish for pupils to experience participating in larger groups. However, this is sometimes detrimental to the pace at which more able pupils learn because time is not used to best effect as pupils do not move quickly enough on to individual activities. There are very few interactive whiteboards and so teachers rarely use ICT as a teaching tool. This is a missed opportunity to enliven learning, and pupils confirm that they wish that the school had more of this resource.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils receive a satisfactory range of learning activities, which are supported well by a variety of additional experiences. Educational visits reinforce learning, and residential trips, included as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, contribute greatly to pupils' personal development. Good links with partners support the quality of the curriculum. A local college link enables pupils to follow a series of vocational taster courses and local employers provide work experience placements. A few pupils pursue courses such as GCSE photography at local mainstream schools. One morning each week, pupils in Years 10 and 11 and post-16 students follow an option. This arrangement introduces some variety, but generally the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 lacks richness, breadth and innovation. There is little planning to develop pupils' practical and creative experiences. In part, this is because of the accommodation; the pressure for more classroom space resulted in losing the design and technology room and having to re-house the subject with art. In addition, physically disabled pupils do not have ready access to all areas of the school. Other opportunities to enliven the curriculum are not exploited fully, such as setting up a mini-enterprise or team enterprise scheme through local education/business partnerships. The emerging evidence from the creation of ability sets in English, mathematics and science for Years 7 to 9 is that this is contributing to the rate at which pupils learn. It is too early to determine how more effectively all the pupils with autism learn as a result of curriculum innovations because these changes are too recent to have had a significant impact.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is a very caring community and the pupils' welfare is at the forefront. All the required child protection and safeguarding measures are securely in place. Despite risk assessments being carried out as a routine part of its work, the school faces a constant uphill battle to keep on top of deteriorating buildings. Much of the accommodation shows signs of age, such as wood splintering and breaking away, broken and uneven paving slabs, ground floor windows opening to a dangerous degree as there are no stops on them and asphalt areas breaking up into small 'pebbles'. Some pupils say that they sometimes feel unsafe at break times, and certainly the mix of activities, such as playing football and riding mini scooters, in a relatively small area, could result in an accident. Strong links with other agencies address pupils' many needs and put them in a good position to learn. For example, a multi-agency support team has helped staff with pupil management but they have not been fully trained to deal with pupils with the most challenging behaviour. Evolving systems of tracking pupils' achievements enable staff to support pupils' academic progress and there is growing emphasis on involving pupils in self-assessment of their work. The new traffic lights system that pupils use to show their evaluations of how well they are able to tackle things independently or with varying degrees of assistance is a good innovation, of which both pupils and parents approve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Many parents comment very favourably on the changes that the headteacher has implemented in the last three years. They recognise that she has moved the school forward, guided by a clear vision of what is hoped to be achieved. However, it is only in recent times that she has been able to establish her own leadership team to support this. As this team gains experience and confidence, it is becoming more adept at making self-evaluation more effective by using the monitoring information that it collects to bring about change. For instance, the regular monitoring of classroom practice has raised the overall quality of teaching because it has enabled targeted support to be provided where required. Other features of the school's work have not progressed at such a rapid rate, such as changes to improve the provision for pupils with autism, a consistent approach to alternative methods of communication and adults' use of ICT. In particular, leaders have not developed an established set of principles against which they can evaluate all pupils' progress and achievement. Governors play a good part in monitoring the work of the school through planned and focused visits and are, therefore, well informed and able to provide support and challenge to school leaders.

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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?	3	2
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?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	IE ²	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

23 May 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Ravenswood School, Nailsea, BS48 2NN

Thank you for the welcome that you gave us when we visited your school, with particular thanks to those who gave up their time to speak with us. We greatly enjoyed the time that we spent in your school.

Yours is a satisfactory school where you make adequate progress. The post-16 department is good. We were really impressed with how often you go to school and how well you behave. You develop into polite and grown up young people. You help each other a great deal and willingly take on jobs around school. You know a lot about how to stay fit and remain safe. The staff do a good job in helping you to get ready for leaving school and you make the most of this. It was very pleasing to see that all of your friends who left school last year went to college.

The people who run the school have lots of ideas about how they can make things better and we have given them some ideas to help:

- make the buildings and play areas better
- check in detail that every one of you is doing as well as you possibly can
- use computers more often and make sure that every one of you can follow what is going on in lessons so that you can learn even more.

We know that you love being at school and that you make lots of friends. You are proud of Ravenswood School and you can help the staff to make things even better by continuing to go to school as often as you can and working hard while you are there.

Thank you once again and we wish each of you the very best of luck in the future, especially those who are leaving school this year.

Mike Kell Lead inspector



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Lead inspector