

Rocklands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124517
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314946
Inspection date	20 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gwyneth Hodge
Headteacher	Anthony J Dooley
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2003
School address	Wissage Road Lichfield WS13 6SW
Telephone number	01543 510760
Fax number	01543 510762

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school for pupils with a range of special educational needs. Whilst the majority have severe learning difficulties, a number have moderate learning difficulties, a small number of pupils have profound learning difficulties and several pupils have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Pupils come mainly from Staffordshire but some travel in from other local authorities. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and all come from home backgrounds where English is their first language.

The school has changed considerably since the previous inspection and now caters only for primary-aged pupils. It is due to move to a new site at a mainstream primary school next year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Rocklands provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has gone through a period of considerable change over the last two years but through the hard work and dedication of staff it has maintained many of its strengths, particularly in ensuring that care, guidance and support of pupils remain strong. As a result, pupils make good progress in their personal development. The school has excellent partnerships with parents and professionals and this contributes greatly in promoting pupils' well-being. The support of parents for the school and staff is overwhelming. Many comment on the increased confidence of their children and the commitment and help of staff. Their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote, 'The school is led and taught by people who really care about making a difference to the children's lives. As soon as you walk through the door you are met by a bright, happy, relaxing and child-friendly environment.' Pupils clearly like school and talk enthusiastically about all the activities they do. They have a good understanding of keeping healthy and staying safe, and their behaviour in and around school is very good.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning. There are, though, several factors which prevent pupils from making better progress. Whilst the curriculum is satisfactory overall, the school day is not planned effectively to ensure there is sufficient teaching time. Class sizes are far too big and this reduces the attention teachers can give to individual pupils. Despite this, pupils achieve satisfactorily because teaching is satisfactory and has several strengths. These include teachers' good knowledge and understanding of pupils' special needs. This is used well to plan work for pupils in ability groups and to ensure pupils benefit from as much help as possible from the support of staff. Children in the nursery get off to a good start. They benefit from good teaching that enables them to make good progress in their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior leaders have been successful in bringing about a smooth transition from an all-age school to a primary school and there is a strong sense of commitment from staff and governors to move the school forward. Senior staff recognise that managing recent changes, together with the need to plan for the school relocation next year, has been time consuming and that more time needs to be devoted to improving self-evaluation. Although the school has an appropriate understanding of its strengths, it does not analyse pupils' achievements well enough to know if they are achieving as well as they should. As a result, its areas for development are not always well focused and the school's view of its effectiveness is over-positive in a number of areas.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The levels pupils reach are well below those expected nationally because of their learning difficulties. Achievement, however, is good. Leadership and management of the nursery are good and well focused on ensuring that children make good progress. Very good attention is given to developing children's communication skills and this enables them to make big gains in their ability to communicate. Effective teaching encourages children to be as independent as possible and parents are very positive about the progress their children are making, particularly in their personal development. One parent commented that her son's 'communication has progressed well and we are all seeing signs of massive improvement in all areas'. Staff have a very good understanding of children's special needs and the newly established assessment systems ensure that activities are well matched to children's abilities. Good use is made of the

accommodation to enable staff to work with small groups and activities are well planned and purposeful. Resources are adequate, although the nursery is looking to extend these further to enable staff to provide a greater range of activities. The curriculum is effective and there are good opportunities for children to learn through their senses and through movement. The care and welfare of children is a high priority and children are kept safe and are well cared for.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase teaching time to ensure pupils have more opportunities to make better progress.
- Develop systems for analysing pupils' progress so that the school has a clearer understanding of how effective it is and what it needs to do to improve.
- Reduce the number of pupils in each class so that teachers are able to give sufficient attention to pupils' individual learning needs.

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

Standards are well below average because of the nature of pupils' learning difficulties. Achievement is satisfactory. The school recognises that pupils do not always achieve their learning targets owing to insufficient teaching time. There is a good focus on developing pupils' skills in communication throughout the school and this enables pupils to make good progress in this aspect of their learning. Teachers use symbols effectively and pupils learn to use these well both in their written work and to enable them to understand and be involved in activities. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in their reading and their skills are improving because of recent developments in the teaching of literacy and improvements in resources.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. They talk about all the trips they go on, such as to the science museum, and there is great enthusiasm for all the activities, including horse riding and swimming, which they know keep them fit. They also have a good understanding of healthy eating and talk about ensuring they eat fruit and vegetables, explaining that 'yoghurt is good for you because of its calcium'. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe and comment that they can talk to teachers if they need help. Through the development of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, pupils develop sound skills to help ensure they make satisfactory progress in the future.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils show a good understanding of others, particularly those who have problems managing their behaviour, commenting that 'they can't help what they do'. Their concern for others is reflected in all the work they do to raise money for a number of charities. They value all the opportunities to celebrate their own and each other's successes and many gain recognition for their kindness and good behaviour. The school council has only recently been established but is already a force to be reckoned with and is keen to be as involved as much as possible. Pupils have a

developing understanding of different festivals, although their understanding of life in a multicultural society is not as well promoted as other aspects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

A strength of teaching is staff's knowledge of pupils and this is used well to divide the very large class groups into smaller ones matched to pupils' abilities. This enables teachers and support staff to work more effectively with different abilities. Despite these strategies, the groups themselves are often still too large and not all pupils make the progress they should because staff cannot give them the support they need. As a result, some pupils struggle to complete tasks or finish them quickly. Occasionally the pace of lessons is slow because pupils have to wait their turn to be involved in an activity, and on these occasions they can become restless. Planning for the use of support staff is good and in the majority of lessons they are used well to record pupils' progress and responses in lessons.

Pupils talk positively about the fact that they feel they are making progress in their learning. They appreciate the comments they get from staff which help them know what they need to do to make their work better. The marking of pupils' work is good, with clear notes to show the level of support pupils have received.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has a number of good features. It covers all expected subjects and is enriched by a good range of activities that support pupils' learning well. It contributes greatly to pupils' enjoyment. Pupils are confident to talk about what they have learnt, explaining for example the skills they have developed through making cakes when they learn 'to follow instructions'. Their enthusiasm for after-school clubs is evident in the number of pupils who stay behind to attend. These activities contribute further to pupils' learning and personal development.

The curriculum does not ensure pupils make the progress they should because time is not planned effectively during the school day. The main weakness is that actual teaching time is well short of that nationally recommended. This is evident, for example, in the planning for activities at the start and end of the day. This lacks rigour and does not ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to learn and develop their basic skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and welfare of pupils is given a high priority by staff and there are very good systems in place that ensure pupils are safe and well cared for. The very close partnership with a range of other agencies and health staff is greatly valued by parents and contributes very effectively to pupils' good personal development and well-being. Procedures for child protection and the vetting of staff are very thorough and there is a good level of training to ensure staff are kept up to date.

The support and guidance for pupils' academic progress is good. The school has successfully improved the accuracy of teachers' assessments and this is enabling staff to develop a better understanding of pupils' achievements. This in turn is beginning to ensure that pupils' targets

are appropriate and their next steps in learning are clear. Older, more able pupils are aware of their targets and the school is looking at ways of enabling all pupils to be more involved in setting their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management have ensured that the school has improved since its last inspection, and the recent major changes have been well managed. Senior staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and work very well together. The role of subject managers has not developed as fast as the school intended but managers are now involved more in monitoring teaching within their subjects and have a better understanding of their contribution to whole-school developments. There is a clear commitment on the part of all staff to improve the school further and the school is appropriately placed to move forward.

Analysis of all the monitoring information the school has is not sufficiently thorough. As a result, it does not have a clear enough understanding of the areas it needs to improve. This has prevented the school from setting measurable targets linked to pupils' achievements by which governors and senior managers can measure the school's effectiveness. Governors are closely involved in the school and are very supportive. They recognise, though, that they need to increase the challenge they set the school for improving its effectiveness. The school has worked hard to make best use of its finances. It does not, however, have the financial capacity to ensure class numbers are within recommended sizes. Staff and governors are fully aware that this is having an impact on the progress of pupils and are working closely with the local authority to find a solution.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

- Thank you for making us so welcome, talking to us and helping us during the inspection. We especially enjoyed the discussions we had with you during the day. Right now your school is doing a satisfactory job and has improved since the last time it was inspected. Here are some of the most important bits of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about
- The school cares for you well and makes sure you are well looked after.
- You make good progress in learning how to behave and mixing and working with other people.
- You do well in learning to communicate with people.
- We know how much you like school and all the different things you do during the day.
- Your school works very closely with your parents and carers and other people to make sure you are well looked after.
- The children in the nursery get off to a good start in school.
- Your teachers know you well and you know that they help you to do better in your work.

To improve further we believe the school should now

- Increase the time you have for lessons.
- Make better use of what it knows about your work to improve the school further.
- Reduce the number of pupils in each class so that teachers can give you more attention.

We wish you well for the future and hope that those of you in the school council make sure you are fully involved in the school!

21 February 2008



Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Rocklands School, Lichfield WS13 6SW

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Yours sincerely,

Sarah Mascal
(Lead inspector)