

River House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125795
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	315312
Inspection date	5 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John West
Headteacher	Michael Turner
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2004
School address	Stratford Road Henley-in-Arden Henley in Arden B95 6AD
Telephone number	01564 792514
Fax number	01564 792179

Age group	11-16
Inspection date	5 February 2008
Inspection number	315312

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

River House is a small special school for boys who have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. A minority of pupils have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school is subject to local authority reorganisation proposals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

River House is a satisfactory school which helps pupils achieve to a satisfactory level in their subjects and courses and progress well in their personal development. The school transforms the lives of most of its pupils, who arrive after disrupted schooling with a history of difficulties in behaviour. Pupils quickly begin to enjoy learning and are keen to do well, and this is appreciated by parents and pupils alike. The school has a warm, caring family atmosphere where pupils feel very safe.

Pupils of all ages and abilities make satisfactory progress overall, although this varies within subjects and age groups. In Key Stage 3, most pupils achieve well in English and science and to a satisfactory level in mathematics. In Key Stage 4, progress slows for several reasons, but underlying them all is a lack of focus by leaders at all levels on the rates of progress that can be expected from pupils. This has, for example, led to a relatively low number of qualifications being offered and achieved. Although some subject teachers know how much progress their pupils are making, senior staff do not monitor this regularly or use the information to help set challenging academic targets for all groups of pupils, some of whom report that they find the work too easy. Lessons are usually lively and enjoyable, but knowledgeable, committed teaching is not resulting in consistently good learning. This is because teachers do not have sufficient information about the capability of individuals when planning lessons. Despite some highly skilled work with pupils personally, leadership and management and teaching and learning are therefore satisfactory rather than good.

Pupils generally act in a mature and responsible manner in school and they take on some considerable responsibilities, including supporting children in other schools. Their good contribution includes sitting on local authority interview panels, weeding the wildlife garden and mentoring younger pupils. They clearly enjoy school and this is evident in improved behaviour, attendance and attitudes to work for the large majority. As one parent typically reported, 'The boys at River House are fortunate to have such expertise.' This expertise is very effective in caring for pupils and in supporting them well so that they gradually understand how to behave, learn and gain the confidence necessary to have suitable goals in life.

The satisfactory curriculum is enriched by a wide variety of activities to encourage and motivate pupils. The school is particularly successful in providing pupils with activities to support their different interests. Many of the activities, such as horse riding, skiing and hiking, widen horizons and allow pupils to begin to value themselves. In this way and in their improved social and basic skills, pupils are well prepared for their future lives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall progress pupils make in all subjects, especially mathematics, and increase the number of qualifications they achieve.
- Provide clear information about individual pupils' predicted rates of progress for teachers to use when planning lessons.
- Develop systems which enable leaders at all levels to monitor pupils' progress and set more challenging targets in every subject.

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 on entry and throughout the school are below national averages due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Although achievement is satisfactory overall for all ability groups, there are considerable variations within subjects and within the different groups. Some pupils make good progress, including pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in literacy. A few, however, do not make adequate progress, especially in mathematics. English and science are the strongest subjects, especially in Key Stage 3, because teachers plan lessons carefully to meet different needs. The number of qualifications available and therefore achieved is lower than in other similar schools. Pupils demonstrate success by moving on to further education or the workplace, as a result of their improved personal skills and increasing ability to learn.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school completely changes the prospects of most of its boys and helps them to take charge of their lives and futures. They often comment that they are enjoying school for the first time and for many, their previously very low attendance is now good. Despite usually good behaviour, there remain inevitable difficulties, although the disruption to learning is kept to a minimum. Most show considerable improvement in their attitudes to learning and many begin to learn effectively for the first time. The school is a very caring and safe community where the boys gain insight into their own difficulties and those experienced by others. They show plenty of care and consideration towards each other. Any bullying consists mainly of name-calling and pupils say that they have confidence that it is dealt with well. They frequently express a sense of amazement at the things they see and do and they appreciate and respect different people and cultures. The boys are very keen to help around the school, playing their part in assembly, tidying up and helping out on trips. Where they show particular skills they are used to support others in lessons. With improved attitudes, social and basic skills, and a well rounded preparation for the world of work, pupils can look forward to a brighter future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and manage their behaviour well. Pupils like the way teachers are friendly and lessons are generally calm and well ordered. Activities in lessons are enjoyable, which means that pupils are usually engaged and have a keen sense of purpose. Teaching assistants contribute skilfully to helping pupils meet their targets. Lesson planning, however, does not take sufficient account of what individual pupils should be expected to learn by the end of each year. Teachers know what pupils have learned but are not at all clear about what rate of progress to expect. As a result, pupils' academic targets and many lessons are not sufficiently challenging to ensure good progress overall. This is despite a generally good knowledge of the subjects being taught and keen commitment by teachers to help pupils do their best. Lesson planning does take full account of pupils' personal development targets, which is one reason why their attitudes to learning, and their behaviour, are usually good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There has been an increase in the number of subjects taught and the curriculum now meets requirements and builds learning systematically. The school recognises that the number of accredited courses offered is still too low to fully support pupils' individual aptitudes and is adding to them each year. It recently introduced art and motor vehicle and road user studies at entry level, for example. Good links with other organisations mean that there is a suitable range of courses and activities to introduce pupils to the world of work, which is why the majority find successful placements when they leave. The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. For example, activities to encourage pupils' understanding of healthy and safe living are thorough and well organised. This means that many pupils are keen to take plenty of exercise and eat healthy food. There is a wide and varied range of activities linked to pupils' individual interests and needs, including strong provision for sports and the arts. Visits, visitors, theatre trips and climbing are but a few of the many things offered to bring learning alive for pupils and increase their sense of achievement and self-worth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures to safeguard pupils are robust and of a high quality. The guidance given to support pupils' personal development is also good. There are effective and very well monitored systems for improving behaviour and attendance. Senior staff track pupils' personal targets with them weekly and help is regularly given as soon as it is needed. Strong links with other agencies support this work. The school day is punctuated with further opportunities for reflection, guidance and celebration of success. Teaching assistants contribute substantially to this work. The guidance to help pupils reach high standards, although satisfactory, is not sufficient to ensure that all pupils do as well as they could. It is left to individual teachers to track pupils' academic progress and, although academic targets are set for each pupil, they are not sufficiently challenging or linked to expected rates of progress. This tracking only takes place in English, mathematics and science. However, teachers' individual knowledge of pupils and dedication to helping them achieve ensures that progress for the majority is at least satisfactory. Pupils receive good guidance and support to help them choose careers and move into the world of work or further education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are very effective in maintaining an orderly and smoothly run environment. Senior staff have successfully continued to refine the systems for the crucial work of supporting pupils' personal development and emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. This has resulted in a reduction in the use of restraint, the number of exclusions and incidents of bullying. Attendance has also improved. Findings from self-evaluation have also led to an improvement in the performance of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in information and communication technology, the humanities and pupils' writing skills. However, improvements in pupils' academic achievements have been slow. The capacity to improve is therefore satisfactory.

The effectiveness of self-evaluation presents a mixed picture and is satisfactory overall. Although quite thorough and effective for pupils' personal development, it is less effective in terms of a whole-school overview of how well pupils are progressing academically against challenging targets. The information is there but it is not organised or monitored sufficiently well for leaders or governors to pinpoint accurately where improvement is most needed and in which subjects. The school has already recognised this shortcoming and is seeking to address it.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
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	2

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 being so welcoming when I visited your school. I enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons.

Your school has a friendly and caring atmosphere. It is a satisfactory school, with many good things going on, just as you described. Satisfactory teaching helps all of you to make at least adequate progress in your lessons, and good progress in your social and personal skills. Your lessons are usually enjoyable. Some of you make good progress but this varies within subjects and within age and ability groups. I have asked the school to help you all to make more progress, especially in mathematics, and to gain more qualifications. I have also asked the school to link all lessons closely to improved individual subject targets, so that everyone is better guided to make faster progress. I am sure that you will discuss this with your teachers and help them by working hard and doing your best to reach those targets.

Staff and governors do a satisfactory job in seeing that the school keeps improving. I have asked them to look more closely at how much progress you are making so that they can be clearer about which subjects and groups need further improvement. They do a very good job in helping many of you to turn your lives around and begin to enjoy learning.

I am impressed with the responsibilities that you take within the school, how much care you show towards each other and how well you help out in other schools. Most of you behave well and want to do well in your learning. It is pleasing to see that you try to take plenty of exercise and eat a healthy diet. You have a sound curriculum and your teachers see to it that you have lots of activities to keep you interested, particularly the amount of sport, artistic activities and outdoor education. The school keeps you safe and looks after you well.

You clearly enjoy coming to school. I think that this fact, alongside your good skills in working together, will help prepare you well for your next school and future lives. I would like to see you carry on with the good work you all do to help the school develop further.

6 February 2008

Dear Pupils

River House School, Henley-in-Arden, B95 6AD



Thank you for being so welcoming when I visited your school. I enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons.

Your school has a friendly and caring atmosphere. It is a satisfactory school, with many good things going on, just as you described. Satisfactory teaching helps all of you to make at least adequate progress in your lessons, and good progress in your social and personal skills. Your lessons are usually enjoyable. Some of you make good progress but this varies within subjects and within age and ability groups. I have asked the school to help you all to make more progress, especially in mathematics, and to gain more qualifications. I have also asked the school to link all lessons closely to improved individual subject targets, so that everyone is better guided to make faster progress. I am sure that you will discuss this with your teachers and help them by working hard and doing your best to reach those targets.

Staff and governors do a satisfactory job in seeing that the school keeps improving. I have asked them to look more closely at how much progress you are making so that they can be clearer about which subjects and groups need further improvement. They do a very good job in helping many of you to turn your lives around and begin to enjoy learning.

I am impressed with the responsibilities that you take within the school, how much care you show towards each other and how well you help out in other schools. Most of you behave well and want to do well in your learning. It is pleasing to see that you try to take plenty of exercise and eat a healthy diet. You have a sound curriculum and your teachers see to it that you have lots of activities to keep you interested, particularly the amount of sport, artistic activities and outdoor education. The school keeps you safe and looks after you well.

You clearly enjoy coming to school. I think that this fact, alongside your good skills in working together, will help prepare you well for your next school and future lives. I would like to see you carry on with the good work you all do to help the school develop further.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Potheary
Lead inspector