

Rowan Gate Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131079
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	315711
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Karin Heap

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anja Sacke
Headteacher	Laura Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2004
School address	Finedon Road Wellingborough NN8 4NS
Telephone number	01933 304970
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Rowan Gate is a primary special school where all pupils have a statement of special educational need. Few come from minority ethnic backgrounds; eight are Looked After pupils. Almost one third of pupils have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), out of which 13 are taught in a specialist provision; ten pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils with severe and moderate learning difficulties are of similar sized groups each consisting of just over a quarter of the pupil population.

The headteacher has been in post since April 2007, with a relatively new leadership team and a new governing body. The last three years has seen the school in a period of uncertainty, which included the process of becoming a federated school with the local secondary special school in 2005. This federation ended in January 2007.

The school operates a nurture group for pupils from the adjacent primary school. It has received the National Healthy Schools Award and the Artsmark Gold Award in 2006. This year it has also achieved the silver RACE Equality Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Rowan Gate is a good school with several distinctive strengths. Everyone is very committed to teamwork and all have high expectations. There are exceptionally strong relationships between pupils and staff. One parent sums up the school by saying: 'I couldn't wish for a more dedicated, patient and fun education for my child; it is well thought of, imaginative and structured.'

The school has a very strong inclusive ethos, which underpins the exemplary personal development of pupils. Behaviour in and around school is outstanding because pupils receive exceptional care and support. Safeguarding procedures are secure with good arrangements to monitor and record health and safety. Parents feel they are supported very well, with good communication between home and school. The active school council makes a positive contribution, for example they initiated the consultation about the new school uniform and its purchase. Some pupils are involved in setting their targets and they have started to contribute to their own review meetings. This good practice, however, is not yet used with all pupils across the school to make sure that everyone makes the best possible progress. On entry to school and beyond, the knowledge and skills of pupils are exceptionally low in comparison to the national average. Given their particular and specific needs, however, pupils achieve well. They make good progress because they are taught well and, in the best lessons, they learn independently. Activities are skilfully matched to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Academic guidance is well developed in some areas of the school but this practice is not yet fully embedded to include all pupils. Links with parents are exceptionally strong and the school works with other agencies extremely effectively to ensure pupils receive the highest possible standard of care and support. Pupils' good achievement prepares them well for the next stage of their education and future life.

The Foundation Stage is exceptionally effective and the school has excellent links and working partnerships with the community and, in particular, with local schools. For example, the nurture group for pupils from the adjacent primary school is very successful and highly regarded by other professionals. Pupils are prepared well for their next stage of education through effective induction plans, both when entering and when leaving school. The outstanding curriculum meets the complex and very wide range of needs of all pupils extremely well. Many enrichment activities are provided, which include an extensive range of lunchtime clubs, educational visits and visitors, and a two-week summer play scheme. The school has worked hard to develop its use of alternative communication; however, some opportunities for independent communication are missed because the use of sign language is not used consistently in all areas of the school.

The school is led well and provides good value for money. The headteacher has a very clear vision and a firm commitment to bring about improvement based on effective self-evaluation and shared leadership. Leaders and staff share professional pride and the focus on raising standards. The school benefits from good training and development opportunities to ensure that all staff, including support assistants, are able to fulfil their roles effectively. Middle leaders have recently become involved in the school's monitoring and evaluation processes. New assessment procedures are now established and staff use the information to inform their teaching. Governors offer good support and increasingly hold the school to account. The school has improved well since the last inspection and is in a strong position to develop further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Although knowledge and skills on entry to the Foundation Stage are exceptionally low, children make good and, at times, outstanding progress because staff have strong relationships and teach them extremely skilfully. They take into account the very early development of children and their specific and complex needs. Parents are effectively supported and, therefore, able to contribute well to their children's learning. Detailed assessments and very good planning ensure that children's learning needs are identified quickly. As a result, children learn and develop at a very good pace.

The two Foundation Stage classes are led and managed exceptionally well. There is a clear commitment to working very closely with parents and other agencies and children's assessments and the monitoring of progress are used very successfully to inform their future learning. The Foundation Stage is very well resourced, including an exciting and exceptionally well organised new outside classroom. This facility provides a good range of interesting activities where children develop into very happy and, as far as is possible, independent and confident young learners.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve all pupils in setting and meeting challenging targets in order to increase their achievement to the highest level.
- Develop pupils' communication at all levels, especially the consistent use of sign language.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills are exceptionally low when they join the school and by the time they leave, owing to the nature and complexity of their needs. Relative to their starting points, pupils make good academic progress. In their personal and social development, progress often is outstanding. When the pupils leave school they successfully join the local secondary special school or mainstream provision because staff prepare them well for moving on and have high expectations. Pupils with additional needs are fully included and make good progress because staff skilfully take into account their individual, and often very complex, needs. The school has started to use assessment information to set whole-school targets to improve pupils' learning. However, because the tracking system is in its early stages of development, these targets are not yet sufficiently challenging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils love coming to school, which is reflected in their very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils develop an acute spiritual and cultural awareness through the many opportunities provided in assemblies and activities across the curriculum. Pupils have an exceptionally strong awareness of being healthy, with many opportunities to exercise and eat healthily. They act safely and with respect and consideration for others; they feel very safe and secure and show good understanding of how to behave in a safe manner. Pupils are able to contribute very well to their school community. For example, older pupils help younger ones at playtime. There are exceptional opportunities for pupils to integrate with pupils from other schools when, for instance, younger pupils join the nearby primary school and older pupils

attend the local prison for their physical education lessons. These opportunities help to promote pupils' self-esteem and prepare them for life outside school. The school council plays an important part in school development and has been recognised for its work to improve noise levels in the hall at lunchtimes and for its contribution towards planning the new playground for the older pupils. Attendance is satisfactory. This is reflected in the significant amount of pupils who have complex medical needs. The school does the best it can to promote attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is at least good and some lessons are outstanding. This good provision ensures that pupils make good, and sometimes excellent, progress, particularly in their personal and social development. Teachers and their very skilled and dedicated support staff work in effective partnership to support pupils' learning. High quality relationships and social harmony are evident throughout the school and underpin pupils' very positive approach to their learning. Teachers have high but realistic expectations and are beginning to use assessment to monitor pupils' progress. However, teachers are not yet consistently using the assessment information to set meaningful targets which are accessible to pupils, allowing them to understand the next stage in their learning. Planning is thorough and well informed by knowledge of pupils' earlier learning, and most activities are suitably challenging. A wide range of teaching strategies are used to ensure that all pupils have an equal chance to participate in lessons. Teachers use praise very effectively to stimulate and motivate pupils to give their best. The school uses very consistent and effective strategies to manage behaviour, this enables pupils to quickly regain control and make the most of their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The broad and balanced curriculum is outstanding and much enjoyed by pupils. It ensures that work is matched well in lessons so that pupils make at least good progress. Pupils show an exceptionally good attitude for learning and activities are finely tuned to meet the specific needs of all pupils, including those with the most profound needs. Provision for literacy and numeracy is well planned and the school uses an extensive range of information and communication technology to effectively support pupils' learning. A wide range of enrichment opportunities to broaden pupils' learning includes both on- and off-site activities. Pupils attend a very good range of lunchtime clubs and have excellent opportunities to visit other schools, for example to take part in sports and creative work at the adjacent primary and nursery schools. There are also links with two junior schools for art and science lessons. The school regularly contributes to music performances with other schools at the local theatre, and offers a well planned and very successful induction programme to prepare pupils when they join the school and for transition to their secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is exemplary because all staff are committed to providing the highest quality of care for every pupil. This is demonstrated by their response to the detailed knowledge of the strengths and needs of individuals. Academic guidance is good in lessons, using verbal feedback

and constructive commentary on pupils' work. There are examples of good marking, but this feedback is not yet used by all teachers to involve pupils in their own learning. In addition, pupils are not yet fully involved with planning their targets or their participation during annual reviews. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety are robust and this is reflected in lessons where staff emphasise safety at key points. Parents are extremely supportive of the school's work and particularly value the progress their children make in their personal and social development. They appreciate the good communication between school and home and one parent commented: 'This is a school where every child matters, staff have very strong relationship with parents.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and her leadership team set a very clear direction and are focused on improvement through effective self-evaluation. The headteacher's very strong commitment and vision has brought about the necessary improvement at an effective and quick pace. All leaders are united in their desire for improvement and have gone the extra mile to ensure all pupils make at least good progress. They have correctly identified areas for improvement, for example within self-evaluation, which is not yet firmly established in all areas of school leadership. The school has begun to evaluate its data to further sharpen school self-evaluation but this has not yet had the full impact on pupils' good achievement.

The school has recently refined its assessment and planning strategies and subject leaders are beginning to use these to track curriculum coverage and pupils' progress in their subjects. The relatively new governing body has received a good range of training and support. Governors offer a range of complimentary skills and are in the early stages of using monitoring and evaluation strategies to hold the school to account. They provide a good balance of challenge and support to the school.

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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
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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?	2
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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 welcoming me to your school. I really enjoyed my time with you and talking to you about your work. It is great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and to see how well you behave. You are all very friendly, cheerful and polite and helped me feel at home in your school.

When I visited your lessons, I was impressed by all the good work that you are doing. I could see that you enjoy your learning and that you are keen to help each other. One example of this is the work you do as a school council, when you make sure that it is not too noisy at lunchtime. Another example is the good way in which you use symbols and pictures to help you learn better. I also saw the many interesting activities adults were planning for you and the fun you have.

I am very pleased to tell you that you are lucky to go to such a good school. All the adults who work with you take great care of you and want you to do your best. You are doing well to learn new things and this helps you to be well prepared for when you leave school. You are also doing extremely well in learning how to work together, helping each other and keeping healthy and safe.

I have asked the school to make sure that staff let you know how well you do in your lessons so that they can help you to learn even better. I have also asked that you are given the opportunity to use more sign language to help you talk to your friends who use signing regularly.

I will take away many good memories about your school and have really enjoyed the time I have spent with you. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.



7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rowan Gate Primary School, Northampton, NN8 4NS

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Lead inspector