

Rossendale School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	888/6020
Unique Reference Number	119845
Inspection number	322051
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Rossendale School is a small special school. It is located on the edge of the West Pennine Moors. It caters for 56 students between the ages of eight and 16. Fifty three of the students are boys. Students come from 18 local authorities in the North West of England. Twenty three students are weekly boarders. All students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Some students have other learning difficulties and/or disabilities or mental health needs. All students have a statement of special educational need and some are in the care of a local authority. Most students suffered significant disruption to their education before joining the school. The school aims to, *'enlarge children's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding and thus their awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and to enable them to enter the world after formal education is over as an active contributor in society and an active contributor to it; capable of achieving as much independence as possible'*. (Warnock 1981) The school opened in 1989 and was last inspected in May 2005.

Evaluation of the school

Rossendale School meets its aims very successfully. It provides an outstanding education for its students and ensures that they enjoy school. The curriculum is outstanding and teaching and assessment are good. The provision made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their welfare, health and safety is outstanding. As a result students make outstanding progress in all aspects of their development during their time at the school. The school meets all of the regulations and has made good progress since its last inspection.

Quality of education

The quality of education is outstanding. The curriculum is outstanding. It is based upon the National Curriculum. Some older students also follow key skills courses and some complete national vocational qualifications (NVQs) on college placements. Students in Key Stages 2 and 3 study all subjects of the National Curriculum except modern foreign languages; however, provision can be made for this at a local secondary school if necessary. At Key Stage 4, students benefit from a good range of subject choices and can take up to 10 GCSE subjects. Some students begin GCSE courses in Year 9 and achieve a qualification a year early.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly well developed and students have good ICT skills which they apply well in other subjects. Personal, social and health education and citizenship is fully and highly effectively implemented and underpins all that the school does, resulting in students making outstanding progress in their learning. The provision made for physical education (PE) and outdoor education is very good. Students can participate in a wide range of sports and activities which help them to keep fit. A good range of extra-curricular activities help students to develop their own interests. Boarding students are encouraged to join clubs and activities outside school. Residential visits and extra-curricular activities complement the taught curriculum very well, as do opportunities to visit places of interest and meet with visitors to the school. The school pays particular attention to ensuring that the needs of the very small number of girls are met.

Students are given effective careers guidance and a great deal of practical experience and support. All students in Year 11 have work experience placements. Although very few students re-integrate into mainstream schools, all students begin college placements after leaving school. Students benefit from taster days at college and 'Aim High' programmes which allow them to sample GCE A Level studies and university life. Some ex students have continued their studies at university. The choice of courses is carefully matched to the needs and interests of students and they are given good support to ensure that the transition into further education is successful. All students have a good understanding of British history and traditions. This is facilitated by meetings with local dignitaries and the Member of Parliament for the area and through the active citizenship programme.

Teaching and assessment are good. The school recruits subject specialist teachers and highly qualified teaching assistants. Teachers expect a great deal of their students and work in lessons is usually set at a level which is appropriate to the age and ability of individuals. In most lessons this means that tasks are challenging but achievable. Staff know students well and plan lessons carefully in order to anticipate and prevent potential difficulties and build on success. Students benefit from a great deal of individual guidance and this helps them to complete tasks and stay focused throughout the lesson. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace and a great deal of work is completed. Most students make good progress in lessons and behave well. Occasionally, some students do not progress as well because the work they are given is too easy or too hard and not enough attention is paid to meeting their needs. On these occasions behaviour is not as good.

Speaking and listening skills are promoted well. Teachers encourage students to discuss their ideas and give their opinions and, because class sizes are small, nearly all students contribute. They listen carefully to their teachers and to other students and learn to work as part of a group sharing their ideas with others. They undertake practical tasks sensibly and use tools and other resources safely and effectively. Many students enjoy helping others. Staff are very skilled at helping students to evaluate their own learning and progress. Most students can accept praise or critical evaluation from staff and some are able to give helpful feedback to their peers.

Students join the school with a range of skills and most have average or sometimes above average ability levels. However, most can do much less than would normally be expected for their age and ability. Many have significant gaps in their learning and understanding. They are assessed accurately on entry and their progress, in all areas of their development, is tracked as they move through the school. Students have a range of targets which are matched to their current attainment and needs. They are entered for national tests and examinations at the end of each key stage. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 is well within the range usually expected for students of 11 and 14 and some students exceed national expectations. In 2007, 41% of students attained at least one A*-C pass at GCSE and 99% attained at least one A*-G grade. Most students do a great deal better than this. Some students gained 11 GCSE passes and all students leave the school with at least one nationally recognised qualification. This is a considerable achievement for these students, demonstrating that they have 'caught up' on previous underachievement and that they have the ability, confidence and motivation to be assessed with others of their age.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The spiritual, moral social and cultural development of students is outstanding. In addition to their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties some students have experienced significant difficulties and disadvantage in their lives. This, almost inevitably, leads to very poor self-confidence and very low self-esteem. Students are often reluctant to participate in activities because they do not want to fail. The school works hard to overcome negative attitudes and behaviour and helps students become more confident. They learn to socialise with others living and working as part of a community. Behaviour is usually good. Students are helped to improve their behaviour through clear guidelines and consistent boundaries. Students feel that the school manages their difficulties well and that staff are fair and act in their best interests. Any problems are resolved before the end of the school day so everyone starts a new day with a clean slate. This does much to promote the very positive attitudes which are evident in the school.

Parents who responded to the questionnaire are very pleased with all that the school provides. One parent said, 'I am thankful for the difference the school makes to my son's life. Although he has often been very difficult to manage, Rossendale has been able to see the potential invisible to others.' She added that she 'will be eternally grateful'. Another parent commented that 'at last she has the pleasure of seeing her child happy and settled in a school'. Students themselves recognise how much the school has helped them. One student said she 'would be off the rails' and another said that he 'would be locked up' if they had not attended this school. One student commented that staff are 'not just there for the money but that they really care'. The local authorities who returned questionnaires are also happy with the service the school provides.

Students participate in the school community and feel that all staff take their views into account. They are able to make choices and decisions and to reflect on their

attitudes and actions. They are given very good moral guidance and this helps them alter some less desirable behaviours and to value themselves. They are developing a good understanding of life in other countries and of the cultural diversity of English society. There are two assemblies a day. During the inspection, two Year 10 students made an impressive contribution to assembly by sharing work on anti-bullying completed as part of GCSE coursework and by introducing a questionnaire which will help the school identify and track any bullying which may take place.

Attendance is excellent and this is a very good indicator of how much individual students enjoy their education. Students say that they get on well with everyone at school and that they make good friends. However, the girls would like a few more girls to join the school. Students are very smart and take pride in their work and in their appearance; older students wear their blazers with pride. By the end of their time in school all students are well prepared for their future lives and able to take their place as useful members of society.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has implemented all the latest guidance on safeguarding students and there are rigorous procedures to ensure that they are kept safe. Thorough risk assessments are carried out for all outdoor and educational visits and there are good procedures in place to keep students safe during the school day. Students are given very good advice on how to stay, or become, healthy and on how to stop dangerous habits which might put them at risk. Staff involve and include parents and carers in their children's education and school and care staff work very closely together. Students are given very effective personal support and guidance and any health needs are identified and treated. As a result their confidence and self esteem develops as they progress through the school and they learn to cope with their particular difficulties and to value themselves. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out the necessary safeguarding checks for all staff. It maintains a single central register of such checks as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is outstanding. The school buildings are bright and well maintained and the newest building provides exceptional accommodation. There are specialist teaching rooms for science, art, design and technology, food technology, and ICT. There is also a small library and a separate dining room. The school does not have a hall but gets round this by making good use of teaching rooms. The all weather pitch is also used as a playground and there is an extensive grassed area.

Views from the school building are outstanding. The school grounds provide opportunities for outdoor education and recreation.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers receive a good range of information. There are regular and informative written reports and formal and informal meetings and telephone calls. The prospectus is clear and informative. An evaluation of progress is included in student reviews and students contribute their own views and opinions.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, fair and well-written complaints procedure. There have been no complaints in the last two years.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Ensure that all the tasks given to students are carefully matched to their needs and abilities.

School details

Name of school	Rossendale School		
DCSF number	8886020		
Unique reference number	119845		
Type of school	S		
Status	Independent Special		
Date school opened	May 1989		
Age range of students	8 to 16		
Gender of students	MI		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 53	Girls: 3	Total: 56
Number of boarders	Boys: 21	Girls: 2	Total: 23
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 53	Girls: 3	Total: 56
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 13	Girls: 0	Total: 13
Annual fees (day students)	£ 29,742.00- 66,963.00		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ 42,804.00- 89,991.00		
Telephone number	01706822779		
Fax number	01706821457		
Email address	rossendale@priorygroup.com		
Headteacher	Mr D Duncan		
Proprietor	The Priory Group		
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI		
Dates of inspection	11–12 June 2008		