

The Ryes School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	881/6033
Unique Reference Number	115427
Inspection number	322267
Inspection dates	22–23 April 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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

The Ryes School, owned by The Ryes School Organisation Ltd (RSO), is located in Sudbury in Suffolk. It opened in 1983. It is an approved special school for up to 37 boys and girls. It is registered for pupils aged 7–16 who have severe and challenging behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Many have experienced neglect, abuse and school failure in the past. As well as providing education, the school has a strong emphasis on developing positive relationships through a therapeutic approach. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and some pupils have learning difficulties, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism.

The provision for pupils aged 7–16 is located on two school sites at Little Henny (for up to 31 pupils) and at Pump Farm (for up to 6 pupils), both of which are in rural situations near Sudbury. After a difficult time in the school's history last year, a new principal was appointed and the school site at Kesgrave, near Ipswich, also closed. At the time of this inspection, there were 19 pupils of school age. In addition, there were 16 students of post-school age. As the school is only registered to provide education up to 16, post-16 provision is not reported on. The post-16 students receive a basic skills education on site and this takes place at Pump Farm, Unity House and at the new Wanda Cottage children's home, near Ipswich. Many students also attend local colleges.

All the pupils are resident in one of the organisation's eight children's homes, some of which are part of the school sites identified above. The majority of the children are looked after by local authorities in England and Wales and it is these which fund the pupils' places at the school and the homes.

The school was last inspected in 2006. At the same time that this inspection was carried out, an inspection of the children's homes took place by Ofsted's Children's Directorate. The findings by the social care inspectors are reported separately.

The school aims to reintegrate pupils into the community through developing their ability to make successful choices and decisions, to take responsibility and to move towards independence from a secure and stable base.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides an inadequate education for its pupils. The provision and pupils' progress in the very small classes for pupils with complex learning difficulties at Little Henny and at Pump Farm is satisfactory and the organisation now has a better focus on improving quality and on monitoring the effectiveness of its provision. However, overall, pupils still do not make satisfactory progress, academically or in their personal development. This is because their behavioural needs are not successfully addressed and they are inconsistently managed. Although recent changes to the curriculum have been instigated to make activities more interesting and meaningful, there is little or no planning for some of these, and the curriculum does not enable pupils to build on previous learning. Overall, teaching, learning, the curriculum, and welfare, health and safety are inadequate. The school meets a majority of the regulations, and many more of them compared to when it was last inspected. However, some important regulations are not met, especially those which relate to the management of pupils.

Quality of education

The curriculum is inadequate. There is a sound curriculum in place for pupils in the complex learning difficulties class and for those at Pump Farm; it addresses the pupils' needs well. This is because staff have a good understanding of these needs, especially with regard to their communication and of how to design suitable activities.

While the school had improved its planning since the last inspection and has had in place long, medium and short-term planning for all subjects taught, it has found that a conventional subject model, has not met the needs of some pupils. This is because there has not been enough of a focus on practical work or on taking into account the best ways in which pupils' learn. Coupled with a very unsettled period last term, with much disruption to learning caused by pupils, the school decided to change its approach.

The school has rightly looked at how it can bring subjects together, such as science and technology, to make activities interesting, and has used off-site providers to deliver projects, such as one concerned with film-making. Each afternoon (and part of one morning) is devoted to practical activities including sport, while during most mornings core subjects, such as English and mathematics are taught. Planning is in place for these subjects and generally builds on pupils' previous experiences. However, the afternoon sessions, such as 'dog walking', the information and communication technology (ICT) project, and football coaching, often have no planning, and sessions are optional. This means that some sessions, such as ICT, do not take place which limits pupils' progress. If pupils do not wish to participate in an activity, there are few meaningful, alternative opportunities planned for them and so they do not have anything structured to learn.

The planning for the science and technology 'market garden' enterprise project is designed to meet pupils' needs, as identified on their statements, and does this well.

Much effort has gone into personalising the programme, especially in relation to pupils working together, helping them to take responsibility and to utilise ICT at times for research. However, the planning does not show how pupils are to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in science or technology. The school's curriculum policy identifies ICT as an important part of the curriculum. However, this subject has not been taught systematically for two terms, since the specialist teacher left. While pupils do have opportunities to make use of ICT in other subjects, they are not, at present, able to make the progress in this subject.

Planning to support pupils' personal development is in place and is adequate. Specific lessons and activities outside the school day are designed satisfactorily to support this area of the school's work. A very important activity designed to get the school and its pupils off to a good start each day, and to focus on their personal needs and successes, although timetabled, rarely takes place. During the inspection, very few pupils attended the 9 a.m. circle time session. The end of day review and celebration was better attended but several pupils also failed to arrive for this session.

The quality of teaching is inadequate. The school has improved its assessment systems and strengthened staff's subject knowledge, which are now satisfactory. The teaching seen in the complex needs class was satisfactory and at Pump Farm was good. However, the main weakness in teaching is similar to that described at the last inspection, in that in several classes teaching fails to make use of strategies to manage pupils with very challenging behaviour. While teachers have a strong knowledge of pupils' backgrounds and their emotional needs, they lack the skills to deal with their behaviour. Furthermore, staff have differing views on what is acceptable behaviour. The systems in place for managing behaviour are inadequate, and when strategies are used, they are inconsistently applied.

The often unsuccessful management of pupils leads to considerable disruption in lessons. Examples include a failure to manage excessive noise from pupils' mobile phones, the considerable swearing or damage to property. The work in lessons often lacks challenge, although when challenging work is set, pupils usually rise to the occasion. Pupils are not always expected to tackle work independently and are sometimes given too much help. Support staff do not always have a clear role in lessons. Lesson planning often just has one objective for the whole class and fails to address the pupils' varying needs and abilities. Pupils' personal targets are rarely referred to, and little is mentioned about the consequences of pupils', often dangerous, actions. There is little use of ICT to support learning.

The assessments made on pupils are now much refined and the systems allow small steps of progress to be recorded utilising National Curriculum levels or nationally recognised 'p levels'. However, the school's data and the information from records show that pupils make inadequate gains in their learning over time. There is a reasonable amount of work undertaken in English and mathematics and progress for most in these subjects is satisfactory. However, there is little support for the few

pupils who struggle with their reading. Work in other areas, especially in ICT and science, is very limited and progress inadequate. The small number of local authority responses, received as part of this inspection, were generally negative about the school's provision and about pupils' progress. However, those received by the school last year showed a 90% satisfaction rate.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. While the school has had success with some individual pupils and staff do try hard to build relationships with them, overall, pupils' personal development is unsatisfactory. Not enough is done to raise pupils' self-esteem, promote reflection or improve their self-confidence. Although there are successes at Pump Farm and in the complex learning needs class at Little Henny, overall pupil's behaviour and attitudes fail to improve and are inadequate. The pupils' lateness to lessons, absconding, unsatisfactory attendance or non-cooperation in lessons has a marked impact on their progress, academically and personally. The school fails to sufficiently engage pupils, and guidance to help them improve their behaviour is inadequate. As a consequence, during the time they are at the school they are not sufficiently prepared for their future lives. Although pupils are taught right from wrong there is little that is successfully done with regard to them accepting responsibility for their actions. Assaults on staff have been high over the past term and there has been much damage to the building and to parked cars. While some pupils say they like being at school, their actions show that they do not enjoy lessons. There is good provision to help pupils' involvement in the local community and the school council does give pupils reasonable opportunities to contribute to school life. Their knowledge of public institutions is adequate and their preparation for living in a multicultural society is reasonable, supported recently through drama activity.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The arrangements for the distribution of medication are now highly systematic. Child protection procedures are satisfactory and risks assessments are detailed, although the level of risk is not always accurately stated. A major weakness is that the school's systems for managing pupils' behaviour are not effective in improving the way the pupils act and respond in lessons or around the school. Some staff identified that they were worried about dealing with pupils for fear of a possible violent reprisal. Damage to property is considerable and results in increased health and safety risks to everyone in the building. Pupils' own health is not aided by the school agreeing to them having regular breaks between lessons to smoke. A number of other health and safety issues were identified, such as the possible damage to pupils' hearing by the loudness of the music they listen to in lessons. Supervision of pupils is inadequate, despite the high number of adults in lessons or around the school. Pupils are not adequately supported and sometimes staff watch pupils undertake serious misdemeanours without taking action. The school meets requirements in respect of the Disability Discrimination Act 2001.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All regulations but one are met. The checks on staff, directors', shareholders' and volunteers' identity, qualifications, enhanced criminal record disclosures, and right to work in the UK are in place and are summarised correctly in a single central record. Applicants for posts who have had breaks in their employment history do not always have these queried. The school's reference form asks referees to comment on a candidate's suitability to work with children but few respond to this because the wording is unclear. The school has now revised its procedures which will take effect when it next has a vacancy.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation at Little Henny and Pump Farm is in reasonable decorative order overall, although some parts are shabby. However, damage at Little Henny, such as to windows, is not always repaired immediately and sends the wrong message to pupils. The flooring in the main corridor and in the meeting room at Little Henny site is in poor condition and is scheduled to be replaced soon.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

This meets all the regulations.

Procedures for handling complaints

This meets all the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that suitable planning is in place for all subjects and activities taught at the school (paragraph 1(2))
- ensure that the technology and scientific areas of learning are properly planned and fully taught (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- ensure that the curriculum provide the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i))

- ensure that teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 1(3)(a))
- ensure that the teaching encourages pupils to apply intellectual, physical or creative efforts and to show interest in their work and to think and learn for themselves (paragraph 1(3)(b))
- provide lessons which are well planned, effective teaching methods used, suitable activities are used and is class time is managed wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- ensure teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly (paragraph 1(3)(h)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence (paragraph 2(a))
- enable pupils to respect the law (paragraph 2(b))
- encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour (paragraph 2(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 3(2)(d))
- ensure that all health and safety risks are minimised or eliminated (paragraph 3(4))
- provide proper supervision of pupils (paragraph 3(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that any gaps in an applicants' employment history is examined and a satisfactory explanation is provided and that references contain all the required information (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that serious damage to property is rectified immediately (paragraph 5(q))
- ensure that flooring is in good condition (paragraph 5(s)).

School details

Name of school	The Ryes School		
DCSF number	881/6033		
Unique reference number	115427		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1983		
Age range of pupils	7 - 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 3	Total: 19
Number of boarders	Boys: 16	Girls: 3	Total: 19
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 16	Girls: 3	Total: 19
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 11	Girls: 2	Total: 13
Annual fees (boarders)	£144,008-£220,266		
Telephone number	01787 374998		
Fax number	01787 371995		
Email address	chris.tanner@theryesschool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Chris Tanner		
Proprietor	The Ryes School Organisation Ltd		
Reporting inspector	George Derby		
Dates of inspection	22–23 April 2008		