

# Rowhill School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119045
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	326931
<b>Inspection date</b>	25 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Charles Hackett

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	96
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Britton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steve McGuinness
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 January 2006
<b>School address</b>	Stock Lane Wilmington Dartford DA2 7BZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01322 225490
<b>Fax number</b>	01322 291433

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- evidence of pupils' achievement and personal development and how this is tracked to demonstrate their progress
- how teaching and the curriculum meet the special needs of pupils
- the quality of care, guidance and support for pupils' learning and personal development
- the effectiveness of senior leaders and the governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's work and in establishing an effective development plan

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of governors, as well as school documentation and assessment information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Rowhill caters for pupils with both learning and behavioural difficulties. Pupils' standards on entry are below average except in the primary department where there are a few pupils of average ability levels. These pupils will transfer to another secondary school at the end of Year 6. The school takes pupils with a wider range of special needs than it did at the time of the previous inspection, following a review of special education by the local authority. Although registered to take pupils as young as five, in reality the youngest pupils it takes are aged seven. The school is due to move into a new purpose-built school within the next twelve months.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Rowhill is a good school. Within the context of the change in its pupil intake and impending relocation it has done remarkably well to maintain this level of effectiveness since its previous inspection. Leadership and management are good. The experienced headteacher and his senior team share a strong passion for ensuring that all pupils are able to develop their confidence, self-esteem and independence. They rightly recognise that the pupils who join them have struggled in mainstream education and have limited social skills and that many face difficulties in their lives out of school. To combat this, the school has developed very clear aims that centre on enhancing pupils' personal development and well-being, including carefully monitoring their progress. This has proved very effective and leads to pupils' personal development being outstanding.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school. 'It's good here' and 'The staff are brilliant' are typical of the comments pupils make about the school. Their enjoyment in lessons is evident whether they are of primary age undertaking pottery in an art lesson, or in secondary lessons developing their football skills in physical education or in constructing a tally sheet in mathematics. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of sports. Break times feature well-organised games and other physical activities. This emphasis on participating in sport is part of the school's successful approach to encouraging healthy lifestyles, as illustrated by the achievement of the school in gaining Healthy School status. For the vast majority of pupils their attendance at school improves considerably, although overall figures are reduced by attendance difficulties of a few. Pupils behave very well both in lessons and during free time, and relate very well to each other. This is a major improvement because their behaviour has caused them difficulties in the past and reduced their opportunities to learn. Pupils feel very safe in school and show considerable respect towards each other and adults. Although members of the school council say there is a little bullying, they are quick to say that staff are very good at tackling this when it does occur. Pupils are proud of the contributions they have made to the school community through the ideas they have put forward on the council. They are already confidently putting forward suggestions for their new school.

Pupils' future economic well-being is very well supported by life skills work, the strong emphasis in the curriculum on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and by the good range of vocational courses. Their understanding of life in other countries is enhanced by fund-raising activities they take part in to support the education and care of a child living in a more deprived part of the world. All of this contributes to pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils' achievement is good. A review of their standards when they join the school and their achievements at different times of their school careers demonstrates good progress. However, the school acknowledges that there is a need for a more rigorous system to track pupils' achievements in order to highlight their rates of progress in different subjects to ensure that they are similar. Many pupils make excellent progress in improving their reading. Good progress is also shown by the entry-level examination results of pupils in Years 10 and 11. These opportunities are now being extended to include GCSEs, with very good results being achieved in art last year. Pupils' good progress is also demonstrated in the successes they have in reaching the challenging improvement targets set for them and in the high percentage of pupils moving on to college and employment training when they leave school.

Teaching and learning are good. The excellent relationships teachers and assistants have with pupils play an important part in this. Typically lessons are well planned and have clear learning objectives and a good range of activities that meet pupils' needs and keep them interested in learning. Teaching assistants are well briefed on the work being undertaken and this allows them to make positive contributions to pupils' learning. Expectations for pupils' behaviour are consistently high and this ensures that pupils know what is expected of them. Good verbal encouragement is given to pupils but the quality of marking varies and at times does not give pupils a clear indication of what they need to do to improve further.

Much thought has been given to the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils. The primary curriculum includes all the National Curriculum subjects alongside effective individual work on improving pupils' reading. Play therapy and speech and language therapy are examples of positive additions to the curriculum. In Years 7, 8 and 9 a good range of subjects are offered, although opportunities to study humanities are limited. For Years 10 and 11 there is a very good emphasis on life skills, vocational training and opportunities to pass external accreditation. Excellent initiatives such as one known as 'Burning to learn' add to the range of courses offered. In this pupils become a 'junior media team' and visit big events or meet well-known personalities. They take photographs and conduct interviews that contribute to the production of a glossy brochure.

Care, support and guidance are good and are particularly effective at supporting pupils' social and moral development. An excellent initiative is being developed which is referred to as 'provision mapping'. Staff use referral forms to alert senior staff to specific concerns about pupils and in response senior staff link in with a wide range of positive interventions. These include access to counselling and courses such as anger management. Good links with other agencies are used well to provide additions to the specialist interventions available. This is all very effective in enhancing pupils' personal development, and pupils themselves report that if they have a problem they know staff will be on hand to support them.

The school is very forward looking and as part of this is developing an effective outreach service for individual pupils having difficulties in their primary mainstream schools. Currently 25 of these pupils are being supported. Evidence indicates that this is contributing to a reduction in the need for the use of permanent exclusions across the local authority.

The school has demonstrated a good understanding of its strengths and where it needs to improve by sustaining its effectiveness during a period of significant change. For example, changes have been made to the curriculum to give a greater emphasis to improving reading. This has proved very successful. Governors play a very active role in supporting the school. Led by a very enthusiastic chair, they are frequent visitors to school and offer a good challenge to its work. However, school development plans are not based on a thorough review of how the quality of provision is having an impact on pupils' achievements. This means there is no guarantee that priorities being addressed are the key ones for school improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop a more rigorous system to track pupils' achievements in all subjects throughout their time at the school.
- Ensure that school development planning is based upon a rigorous analysis of the quality of provision and its impact on pupils' achievements.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	1

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

29 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rowhill Special School, Dartford DA2 7BZ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited you recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you all and seeing you at work and play. You were all very helpful in telling me about your school.

My report judges your school to be good. I know you will not be surprised by this because so many of you told me this. The school is very good at supporting you to learn to behave well and be more confident and independent young people. I think all the staff work well as a team. The senior staff lead and manage the school very well and have ensured that both teaching and the curriculum are both good. This is leading to you achieving well. There are some very good additions to the curriculum, such as play therapy and 'burning to learn', that help make being at school enjoyable. There are good systems to care and support you, especially if you are experiencing some difficulties in or out of school.

To be even better I have recommended that the school does two things:

- Make sure there is a system to track how well you are doing in each subject throughout your time at school.
- Ensure it checks carefully on the quality of its work and how this is helping you all achieve and then use what it finds out to plan for improvements.

I wish you all the best with your studies, and keep up the good work.

Best wishes

Yours faithfully

Charles Hackett Lead inspector