

Riverwalk School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124902
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328237
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	131
Sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Jo Last
Headteacher	Mrs Sheila Carmichael (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 January 2006
School address	South Close Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 3JZ
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector visited 15 part-lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of a local primary school. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessment data, portfolios of pupils' work, the school's safeguarding policies and 34 parental questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the learning and progress of pupils with more complex needs to ensure their needs were catered for
- the learning and progress of pupils in different key stages
- the effectiveness of assessment in ensuring all pupils make at least satisfactory progress
- the school's capacity for sustained improvement as currently reflected in the work of leaders at all levels in the school since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Riverwalk school caters mainly for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant proportion also has more complex needs such as autism, severe challenging behaviour and multi-sensory impairments or a range of complex health needs. All pupils have statements of special educational needs and attainment on entry is very low. The roll of the school has increased since the last inspection. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a small proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils are drawn from a wide area of Suffolk. Very few speak English as an additional language. Some pupils have the opportunity to attend local mainstream schools part-time.

The school also has an Early Years Foundation Stage assessment unit, based on the campus of a local primary school. This unit caters for twenty five children from Riverwalk. Most have a placement with their local providers and nine of them are dual registered. All children attending this unit have a range of learning difficulties which are assessed before they are placed in more appropriate provision to fully meet their needs. Very few of these children have a statement of special educational needs. Riverwalk pupils at Key Stage 1 are also located on the same primary school site.

The school has a number of awards including the Healthy Schools Standard, Sportmark and Activemark awards.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school has made satisfactory improvement since its last inspection. The acting headteacher has effectively driven the school through a period of turbulence in staffing during the last year, sustaining the good improvements identified at the last inspection. The school has developed new assessment systems, newly revised and more effective procedures for safeguarding the welfare of pupils, and stronger links with local schools, colleges and within the community. The sensory curriculum has been improved so that pupils' with more complex needs such as multi-sensory impairments have greater access to learning. Self-evaluation by senior managers, staff and governors is satisfactory. All staff and governors are involved in the process and monitor the work of the school closely. However they do not always take sufficient account of pupil outcomes when evaluating the quality of the schools' provision. Through close monitoring of teaching, leaders are ensuring that it is at least satisfactory throughout the school. Tasks are always matched to the individual learning needs of pupils, which promotes good equality of opportunity. This enables all pupils, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with more complex health needs to make satisfactory progress. However, where learning is satisfactory, there are sometimes missed opportunities for pupils to learn from each other through paired work, teaching assistants do not always support the management of learning and behaviour for the whole class and pupils are not given sufficient time to reflect on the progress they have made. Occasionally assessment information is not always used sufficiently to set realistic and challenging individual and whole school targets. Consequently, the capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. Good support, guidance and care contribute to pupils' good behaviour and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that governors, and staff in leadership roles focus sharply on pupils' outcomes when evaluating the effectiveness of the school's provision and in determining priorities for improvement.

- Improve progress in learning where teaching is satisfactory by:
 - ensuring teaching assistants are supporting the management of learning and behaviour for the whole class
 - providing more opportunities for paired learning
 - giving time to pupils for reflection on the progress they are making.
- Ensure assessment is used effectively in all lessons to improve learning and progress and across the school to set challenging whole-school targets for improving provision and raising achievement.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

Pupils in all key stages make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. Pupils with more complex needs and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties make similar progress to other pupils because teachers ensure that work is always appropriately matched to individual pupils' learning needs. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in work-related learning and in their accredited courses. Pupils make satisfactory progress towards their individual education plan targets, especially their sensory targets. The school's assessment data show that pupils are making satisfactory progress throughout the school.

Pupils are well behaved and considerate to others. Those with more challenging behaviour make good progress in self-control because staff manage behaviour effectively. They take great delight in meeting new people and visitors and thoroughly enjoy all that the school has to offer. Pupils, including the most vulnerable all feel safe and secure in school. They maintain a healthy lifestyle effectively by making healthy choices at meal times, by following their special dietary plans and by vigorous exercise through sport, play and physiotherapy. They gain in confidence and self-esteem progressively as they move through the school. There are good opportunities for reflection and for experiencing awe and wonder through, for example, participating in a presentation about an animal shelter as part of work-related learning. Pupils develop an increasing awareness of the diversity of other cultures through the celebration of festivals, links with a school in Kenya and through art and music. Pupils make a good contribution to others by learning the difference between right and wrong and they learn to respect others, take turns and work independently. They also sing and perform for the local community and, through their mini-enterprise work, they take responsibility for running a café and selling items such as cards they have made.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

Pupils focus on their activities because these are appropriately matched to the learning needs of all of them including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, those with autism and those with more complex health needs. However, there are sometimes missed opportunities for pupils to work together on a task or to reflect on their individual progress in lessons. Pupils try their best and receive at least satisfactory, and sometimes good, support for their learning. Occasionally teaching assistants do not always assist the teacher in managing learning and behaviour for the whole class effectively enough.

Teachers use the recently developed systems of assessment appropriately to track pupils' progress and plan activities to meet individual needs. However, assessment is not always used precisely enough to set individual targets as these are sometimes too challenging. Although there is very detailed assessment information, this is not analysed sufficiently to identify clearly trends in progress across a key stage or across the school. It is therefore difficult to set accurate whole school targets to improve provision and raise pupils' achievement.

The appropriately planned curriculum is relevant to the needs of all pupils, including the most vulnerable and has a number of key strengths. There is a well thought out work-related learning curriculum for older pupils facilitated by effective partnerships with local businesses and community organisations. There are good sporting links where pupils benefit from coaching as a result of the Sportsmark initiative. Good opportunities for enriching learning through visits and visitors to the school enhance pupils' enjoyment of learning. For example, the specialist drama workshops for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties generate excitement, enjoyment and a deep sense of awe and wonder as they become increasingly aware of their environment. The sensory curriculum has improved and this has led to more pupils achieving their sensory targets.

All staff provide good support and care for pupils' personal needs. They use safe handling techniques and ensure personal dignity when helping pupils with toileting and changing. Multi-agency external assistance has a positive impact on the guidance and support given to pupils. The school nurse and medical professionals provide good support for pupils' needs through, for example, providing well thought out care and dietary plans. Although speech therapy support is insufficient, the

school makes best use of what is available.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The acting headteacher has successfully brought about improvements since the last inspection. She has been particularly effective in restoring staff morale after a period of turbulence. Procedures and protocols for safeguarding pupils have been improved to ensure they are effective. Leadership across the school has been developed further, although leaders do not always pay sufficient attention to pupils' achievement when evaluating aspects of provision within their key stages.

Nearly all leaders are promoting equality of opportunity effectively by, for example, matching tasks in lessons to learning needs and monitoring outcomes for particular groups of pupils. The school is effective in meeting the needs of different groups of pupils, such as the most vulnerable and those with complex needs. For example, the curriculum has improved and now includes a more sensory approach for those with multi-sensory impairments. There are now greater opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 1, including those with complex needs, to be included in mainstream school activities. As a result, more pupils are achieving their sensory targets. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. It has strong links with the local community. It celebrates national festivals and world religions and has a link with a school in Kenya.

The governing body has been successful in identifying areas for action and addressing weaknesses. For example, procedures for safeguarding are now secure and staff absenteeism is being tackled effectively. The governors listen to parents views and act on them through, for example, drawing the local authority's attention to insufficient speech and language therapy support for the school. Most governors know the school's strengths and what needs to be improved. However governors' evaluation of the school's work through their own first hand monitoring is not fully developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	3
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so	3

that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from their low starting points in all areas of learning. The good opportunities provided for them to explore and initiate their own activities within a well-supervised and safe environment enable them to develop their creative imaginations. Staff work well as a team, continuously modelling good language and communication skills. Consequently, children learn to take turns and develop their own speaking and listening skills well. There is a good emphasis on phonics and the Early Years Foundation Stage unit benefits from the input of external professionals, including a speech and language therapist who advises staff on the development of suitable programmes to improve children's literacy and communication skills. The indoor learning environment is attractive and stimulating with well-chosen large toys, activity areas and resources. The outdoor area is spacious and used to good effect, although it has been identified as an area for development. Children thoroughly enjoy their activities.

Good leadership ensures that learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage are effectively monitored and reviewed. For example, the coordinator takes into account the views of stakeholders from mainstream schools in evaluating the effectiveness of provision and children's achievement before they transfer to mainstream schools. This contributes to the smooth transition between settings for these children. Assessment is thorough and rigorous with accurate recording of children's progress across all areas of learning. The coordinator analyses this information to gain a complete picture of overall trends in children's progress and uses it effectively to improve learning opportunities, resources and teaching approaches. There are good links with parents, who receive helpful information about their child's welfare and progress.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2

Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make good progress in learning because they focus on tasks and show interest in their courses, sustaining high levels of concentration. Teaching motivates students to learn through the stimulating and enriching learning opportunities provided for them. These include the involvement of local businesses such as the animal shelter and the Royal Mail which significantly enhances learning, preparing them effectively for further education. There is a strong focus on developing students' independence and life skills. Consequently, they make good progress in their Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network courses which are matched closely to their needs. Assessment of the progress of individual students is good and this is used effectively to set individual targets. The Sixth form leader and 14 to 19 coordinator rightly recognise the need to interrogate data and assessment information more thoroughly, so they have a much clearer picture of the progress overall within this provision. They realise that this should help them to establish whole school targets and priorities for further improvement. Both the sixth form and 14 to 19 provision leaders share the same drive and ambition for improvement with a good capacity to further improve.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire expressed positive views about the school. They highlighted the good care and support provided for their children and the specialised help for individual needs. The few concerns raised related to behaviour and the lack of speech and language therapy. Parents are actively involved in the work of the school, through attendance at training meetings and in helping in the classroom. Parents are listened to and their views are widely sought and acted on effectively by the school. For example, they asked for improved access to play facilities for all pupils and initiated fund raising to purchase a specialised roundabout that enables wheelchair use. Nearly all parents, are pleased with the information they receive from the school.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Riverwalk School, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2NJ

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I am writing to let you know what I thought about your school. I really enjoyed meeting you and joining you for your school lunch. I noticed how many of you are choosing healthy things to eat. You are all well behaved and kind to other pupils. Your headteacher has worked hard to make sure you are all safe and the staff take good care of you and help you as much as they can. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and watching how you enjoy learning because staff make sure you can do everything they give to you. You focus on your activities and try hard. You told me how much you enjoy activities like football and there are many exciting learning opportunities for you in school. You all make satisfactory progress in learning and your progress is always checked by teachers. I want you all to keep doing your best in lessons. The school and your parents work closely together to improve things even more for you. Here are some things which Mrs Carmichael and I think will make your school even better.

- The staff and governors should look at how well you are doing before deciding how good your school is and what needs to be done to make it even better.
- Make sure you make good progress in all your lessons by improving teaching in different ways and giving you time to think about what you have learned in a lesson.
- Use the information about your individual pictures of progress in the whole school which can then be used to improve the school even more.

Best wishes

Declan McCarthy
Lead inspector

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