

Rivermead School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134150
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	328840
Inspection date	1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Chappell
Headteacher	Susan Rogers
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2006
School address	Forge Lane Gillingham ME7 1UG
Telephone number	01634 338348
Fax number	01634 338347

Age group	4–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Rivermead is a hospital school for learners with complex emotional and medical needs. It occupies two sites: a hospital room at Medway Hospital, which may have up to 15 learners at any one time, and the main Forge Lane site, providing mainly for learners with emotional needs. The school provides home tuition when learners cannot attend either site. Numbers on roll vary throughout the year as learners are referred or return to their home school. From September 2007 to July 2008, some 279 learners attended the hospital schoolroom, 70 accessed the Forge Lane site, and 21 received home tuition. Learners remain on the roll of their local referring school, as the aim is reintegration. Staff working at the hospital also provide home tuition and education at the Forge Lane site.

Although the school's designated age range extends from 4 to 16 years there are no children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Since 2007, the school has educated a small number of learners aged over 16 in partnership with other schools and colleges. In this report, provision for these learners is mentioned but not reported separately. Placements may be short, medium or long term, depending on individual needs, and learners may have spent a considerable amount of time away from school before admission. Most medium and long-term placements are learners in the secondary phase. Twenty-eight learners have a statement of special educational needs, and two learners are looked after by the local authority. As pupils at Rivermead refer to themselves as 'learners', this term is used throughout the report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Rivermead School provides good education. It has many outstanding features. Partnership is excellent and the school works tirelessly to maximise the impact of the contribution of other services. Parents are very supportive and typically say, 'Compassion and care are second to none' and the school is 'very professional'. Provision leads learners to feel they have a new start. Typically, one learner said, 'I would never have believed I could deal with my difficulties.' Good management and leadership provide very clear direction leading to staff being committed and always striving to do better. Governors provide good support and challenge. Equal opportunities are well promoted and community cohesion well developed. The school sets challenging targets for its development, and planning is closely related to staff training and the management of their performance. However, opportunities are missed to lay provisional plans for subsequent years.

The outstanding curriculum is flexible and extremely responsive to learners' varied and changing needs. It offers a wide range of examination courses and qualifications for older learners including those over 16 years. The introduction of topic-based activities for learners aged 11 to 14 years has been excellently evaluated and has led to higher attendance and much better participation. Excellent care, guidance and support greatly lift learners' confidence and self-esteem. Procedures for safeguarding are securely in place and careful assessments are made of risks. Home tuition is monitored very carefully and excellent support in the hospital setting impressively encourages learners' success and confidence. Learners know and understand their learning targets, but opportunities are missed to engage them more in developing and monitoring these targets.

Because staff set high expectations and are excellent role models, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Learners feel very safe indeed because they trust staff. Learners take their cue from the caring ethos and the support of staff, and as one learner said, 'We look after each other.' Because the school has made it a priority, learners understand healthy lifestyles and do their utmost to act accordingly. They enjoy school and therefore attend regularly and are very punctual for lessons. Their good economic well-being is nurtured by good progress in literacy and numeracy and by valued and valuable vocational experiences. Learners make a good contribution to the community because they are committed to school and are aware of the needs of others more widely. Behaviour is excellent because it is very well managed and encouraged.

Learners' attainment is exceptionally low because of their special educational needs. However, good teaching leads to learners making good progress. Lessons are clearly planned and structured and activities well thought out and relevant. Relationships are strong, there is a good working ethos, and staff work closely as a team. However, the pace of lessons is not always brisk enough and learners are not always given sufficient opportunity to work out activities and problems themselves. Learners, whether at the main school site, in hospital or receiving home tuition, make good progress. They reach challenging targets and attain a good range of qualifications. Since the previous inspection, the school has improved three aspects of provision and has excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning essentially by ensuring the pace of lessons is challenging and that learners are more consistently encouraged to work out problems for themselves

- Increase learners' involvement in setting and monitoring their own targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Learners' attainment is exceptionally low because of their special educational needs and because many previously missed school for health reasons. However, they make good progress because of good teaching and learning. Different groups make good progress, including learners taught in the main school and the smaller numbers taught in hospital or at home. Boys and girls and learners with different disabilities and disorders and needs make good progress. The school sets challenging targets, which learners know and understand, and which they achieve. Individual education plans are effective in setting out strategies to reach key learning targets. Learners attain a good range of qualifications well suited to the levels at which they are working.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding with moral and cultural development being particularly strong. Learners have a very clear sense of right and wrong and the school's emphasis on cultural diversity leads to learners' great interest in other cultures. They feel very safe and mention the contrast to how they felt in their previous experiences of education. One learner says, "School gives me confidence to talk about myself.". They know about healthy lifestyles and try their utmost to act accordingly, for example by eating healthily and being as active as they can. They enjoy school and so their attendance is regular and improving. They are very punctual to lessons. Behaviour is excellent and learners are extremely polite and very sensitive to others' needs. They make a good contribution to the community including the school community. Learners' good economic well-being is encouraged by good progress in literacy and numeracy and a strong contribution from work experience and vocational activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning leads to learners' good progress. Among common strengths of teaching and learning are very good relationships between staff and learners and between learners. Lessons are well planned and clearly structured. Learning intentions are lucidly explained to learners, sharpening the focus of lessons. Staff work closely together as a team and create a good working ethos where learners are ready for work as soon as the lesson starts. Learners rightly say activities are fun and relevant. However, a brisk challenging lesson pace is not always sustained and opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure learners work out problems and tackle questions themselves. These features slow learners' progress so that it is not as strong as it would otherwise be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The broad, flexible and innovative curriculum provides an excellent balance of subjects and activities so that learners are stimulated and encouraged to do well. It is designed very skilfully to combine the requirements of content that need to be learned and the skills that need to be

developed so as to meet the individual needs of learners. Visits, visitors and a host of practical and relevant activities enrich the curriculum. The activities are continuously being developed to find different ways to engage learners. For example, the curriculum for learners aged 11 to 14 years has been redesigned around topics. This innovation has been very thoroughly evaluated and has contributed to improved attendance and motivation. A wide range of accreditation is offered and is strengthened by links with other institutions such as the local college and other schools, which the school has made great efforts to nurture. In the hospital setting, an excellent rich and varied range of activities is provided which offers great flexibility for the transitory population. For learners over 16 years, partnership arrangements with colleges and others successfully ensure a very relevant range of studies suited to learners' needs and skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school works exceptionally well with partners to help ensure excellent care, guidance and support. Learners feel very safe because they trust staff. Clear safeguarding procedures are in place including careful assessments of risks. Individual learners' needs are very carefully assessed involving outside agencies fully. Individual education plans reflect the aims and strategies for learning and development very clearly. The school uses a wide range of data to inform its views of progress. Even though the small number of learners involved and the different lengths of time they have been in education sometimes makes interpreting this data challenging, the school analyses it with great care, using the information to improve support and guidance. Learners know and understand their learning targets very well but are not always fully involved in determining and monitoring these. Home tuition is very carefully monitored. The excellent support in the hospital setting quickly engages learners ensuring they succeed and gain greatly in confidence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers are hard working, committed to the success of the school and forever seeking ways to improve provision and outcomes. They have developed an outstanding sense of direction in the school leading to excellence in three areas since the previous inspection. The school sets challenging targets for its development. Self-evaluation is good and inspectors agreed with nearly all the school's judgements about its performance. School improvement planning is broad and realistic. It is based on a clear assessment of where the school is and where it needs to go and is closely linked to staff development and training. However, because planning is developed only a year at a time, opportunities are missed to refine the process, for example by putting in place costed provisional planning. Equal opportunities are well promoted. Community cohesion is well developed and is monitored and evaluated but not always in as much detail as it should be. The school makes good use of its staff, accommodation and learning resources. The governing body provides vigorous support and challenge.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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 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?	1

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	1
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**

3 July 2009

Dear Learners

Inspection of Rivermead School, Gillingham, ME7 1UG

It was lovely to meet you and talk with you about your school when my colleague and I inspected Rivermead recently.

We found many excellent and good things about your school. The curriculum is first rate. The care and support you receive is outstanding. Your personal development is excellent and you are very courteous and thoughtful. The school is well led and managed. Teaching is good so you make good progress in your work and gain good qualifications.

- There are two things the school could do even better so I have asked staff to:
- Improve teaching and learning particularly by keeping the pace of lessons brisk and making sure you have more chances to work out problems for yourself.
- Involve you more in setting and monitoring your learning targets.

I hope you will help in this by being ready to try to work out problems yourself.

Some of you said you would like to be more involved in setting your own targets so I am sure you will seize the opportunity.

With every good wish for your future

Yours faithfully

Michael Farrell

Lead inspector