

Riverside School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135232
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	329060
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	159
Sixth form	54
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Dr Vivian Hinchcliffe
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Main Road St Paul's Cray Orpington BR5 3HS
Telephone number	01689 870519
Fax number	01689 898818

Age group	4–19
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Inspection number	329060

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Riverside School opened on two sites some nine miles apart in September 2007 as the result of the amalgamation of two special schools in the borough, Rectory Paddock and Woodbrook. It was formally opened in September 2008 as one school on the old Rectory Paddock site, with the addition of new buildings, including specialist rooms. The headteacher and deputy headteacher of Rectory Paddock were appointed in the same roles at Riverside. This is the school's first inspection.

The school caters for learners with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and complex needs, including autistic spectrum disorders. Increasingly, in the early years, many learners also have complex medical and health needs. Many learners can present with challenging behaviour, which at times can be severe. A high proportion also suffer from various physical impairments, including multi-sensory impairment, ranging from mild to profound.

All learners have a statement of special educational needs. Three quarters are of White British origin and the remainder are from a wide range of other minority ethnic groups. Learners come from across the borough as well as from neighbouring authorities. Currently, there are over twice as many boys as girls. Fifteen are at the early stages of English language acquisition and nine are looked after by their respective local authorities.

The school has gained the Activemark, Sportsmark Gold and, more recently, the Artsmark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstandingly successful school meets in full its core aim of providing a first-class education in which each learner's special educational needs are met. Underpinning this is the inspiring leadership of the headteacher and his constant drive for improvement, which is focused on promoting learners' well-being and progress. The senior leadership team contributes extensively to this agenda. A further strength is the highly collaborative and holistic approach of the multi-disciplinary staff involved in the school, as well as the partnerships the school has established with other mainstream providers. This contributes significantly to learners' personal development and well-being and broadens their learning experience. There is a strong culture of communication, collaboration and cooperation between home and school. Parents are fully involved in, and kept informed of, the progress their sons and daughters make. The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the work of the school. Expressing the sentiments of many others, one commented, 'The school has an open, welcoming, loving and caring environment. Each child's family is known and made to feel part of the family of Riverside.'

Achievement across the school is outstanding because of the total education, therapy and support package it offers. Standards on entry are well below those expected for learners' ages. Because of their special needs most learners operate at 'P' levels – levels that are below the standard National Curriculum levels in schools. However, the progress they make in relation to their starting points is excellent. Though standards remain very low compared to national benchmarks, all learners make substantial progress in developing their communication skills and independence. Some are enabled to follow 'entry-level' courses in the sixth form, have progressed to the higher 'P' levels, and have exceeded these by the time they leave the school.

Learners' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural development is excellent. Learners enjoy their education and respond well to the praise they receive. In a 'senior' class lesson, learners were very effectively led and supported as they took turns while working with sounds to help them recognise the order of numbers from one to six. Some delightful facial expressions in response to this were indicative of their enjoyment at being involved. As a result of calm and sensitive support from all adults who work in the classrooms, learners persevere very well and make excellent progress towards their individual targets set for the lessons.

Teaching and learning are outstanding because teachers plan their lessons to ensure that the individual needs of all learners are met fully. This results in a highly effective ethos for learning and is underpinned further by very strong working relationships between teachers, other adults and learners. Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively to ensure all learners receive maximum support and positive encouragement. The curriculum is exceptionally well developed to support the increasingly wide range of learners' needs. Schemes of work and monitoring by leaders ensure that teachers' planning is appropriate and thorough. Learners' individual education plans are monitored alongside curriculum targets to provide excellent well-focused opportunities. There is a very impressive range of enrichment activities both within the school and off-site that broadens learners' curriculum experience.

The quality of care, guidance and support for learners is superb. Exemplary procedures support each individual in very specific ways and ensure all are looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff in working with learners underpin this aspect of the school's provision. When parents attend annual reviews of their

sons' and daughters' progress they are shown a DVD, which illustrates highly effectively what their child has achieved since the previous review.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. Rigorous self-evaluation has resulted in very well-focused development planning, ensuring that the school has continued to improve and develop since the amalgamation in 2007. The school has, for example, identified that it needs to extend the curriculum even further for older and more capable learners by increasing the number of accredited courses available for them. Robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have been used to identify and share good practice, resulting in improved quality. There is excellent liaison and collaboration between all staff, which ensures that every learner really does matter and, therefore, makes excellent progress. The governing body has been highly effective in its support for the school throughout and since the amalgamation. However, because of this amalgamation, governors have not been so rigorous in monitoring the progress learners make. In the light of the improvements and developments since the amalgamation, the clear direction set for further improvement and continuing success in enabling learners to make outstanding progress, the school has an excellent capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

All learners stay on at school at the end of Year 11. Achievement and progress are excellent. Learners continue to improve their communication skills and achieve success. Some are taking part in the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course, which is moderated by a nationally recognised examination board. Others take part in the junior sports leader's award course and support younger learners in their physical activities. Their personal development and well-being are also excellent. They show demonstrable progress in their levels of maturity, as seen in the outstanding quality of relationships they develop with peers and adults in lessons and around the school.

Learners improve their life skills and further their independence, by attending courses in other settings and taking part in a wide range of visits to and beyond the local community. In two lessons, they were preparing their own lunches, having decided the menu themselves. Teaching is highly effective and fully meets learners' needs, enabling them to make excellent progress towards the targets set for the lesson, as well as those targets in their individual education plans. A learner commented, 'Lessons are fun but you actually work harder because of this'. The highly personalised curriculum, including an excellent range of enrichment and preparation for life activities, is also outstanding in this respect. At the end of the last school year, all learners continued on to further education courses. Highly effective care, guidance and support continue to promote learners' personal development really well. Leadership and management are outstanding, with a clear direction and purpose to ensure high-quality provision, improve learners' communication skills, and develop their independence.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

There is no distinct Foundation Stage provision. Because of the range of their special needs these learners are taught alongside Years 1 and 2. The school's rigorous process of assessment prior to entry, and its involvement of parents and all professionals, are very effective in drafting each learner's individual education plan. Very specific targets are set to ensure their needs are addressed fully. Teachers make very good use of these targets to ensure that learners make

progress despite their complex learning difficulties. Teachers and support staff assess learners' progress frequently. In a physical development session for a small group of the younger learners, each had specific and personalised targets to improve their mobility and strength. All the adults, led by a physiotherapist, were fully aware of these and carefully guided each learner in making progress towards them. The curriculum and facilities provide a wide range of excellent opportunities for learners to experience activities both in and out of the classroom. Teachers use exciting resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to motivate learners and make learning fun. Leadership is outstanding in monitoring and supporting this provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the range of accredited courses for older students of higher cognitive ability.
- Sharpen the rigour of governance in monitoring and evaluating learners' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Learning is individualised so that all learners have specific targets for their personal development and the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Rigorous assessment and carefully drafted targets in individual education plans and curriculum subjects support and enable outstanding progress. Although, due to recent amalgamation, the school's assessment data cover only the past two years, staff use their knowledge and records of many learners to determine targets. As a result, progress over time is excellent, including for learners with profound and complex needs and those at higher levels of attainment. There are no differences in achievement between different groups of learners.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Learners love coming to school and enjoy their lessons, other activities and wider opportunities. They are able to eat healthily and participate in a wide range of physical activities, including the use of the 'sunken' trampoline, which allows access at floor level. Learners have achieved much success in competitive sporting activities. While some may become a little frustrated due to communication difficulties, they respond well to sensitive interventions from adults. A calm and positive atmosphere is the norm in lessons and behaviour is good. Though attendance is a little below the national average, unauthorised absence is minimal and authorised absence is because of learners' medical needs. Insofar as is possible, learners take a full part in the school community, for example through the school council where they have recently been involved in discussing healthy food at lunch. Learners make excellent progress in learning skills that prepare them for later life. Older students take pride in their achievements in participating in work experience placements and college. This ensures they are well prepared for leaving school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

All staff know their learners very well so planning is highly focused and learners' progress is closely monitored, which informs future strategies. Lessons are calm, purposeful and suitably challenging. Teachers are highly effective in their use of praise and encouragement, ensuring

it is age-specific in language and not overly effusive. However, some teaching assistants are occasionally too reluctant to ensure that learners do not misbehave and drift off-task. High-quality visual, tactile and auditory resources, including the use of ICT, motivate learners well. In a Key Stage 2 lesson, learners were developing their counting skills using fruit, as well as improving their fine motor skills by cutting the fruit into small slices. The use of a home-made video by a teacher in a 'senior' class was very effective in enabling learners to recall and recognise a range of everyday items in the home. Staff are extremely patient and their expertise ensures learning is effective, not only in lessons but also in all activities throughout the day.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding provision of activities linked to individual targets contributes very well to learners' personal development. The curriculum supports learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly well. Communication is a very strong thread through all learning and many links between curriculum subjects ensure that activities are meaningful and interesting. Excellent provision for physical education and creative activities enhances learners' curriculum experience further. The school's links with other providers enrich learners' experiences, as they join in activities at other schools. A joint production of 'The Tempest', involving Riverside learners, was considered to be a great success. However, the school has recognised that there could be a greater range of accredited courses offered for older learners who are cognitively more able. Excellent resources and new specialised rooms have improved provision greatly. The school is particularly good at using photographic displays to demonstrate learners' progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptionally strong, collaborative, caring and supportive environment where learners are safe, develop their personal qualities and make excellent progress. Learners' achievement and well-being are at the forefront of the school's outstanding ethos of care and education. Highly effective working relationships with other professionals, including the local primary care trust, contribute extensively. Unauthorised absence at the school is not an issue. Nevertheless, if there are potential problems, then these are quickly followed up. Impressive procedures, such as the school's own 'P-tracker' system, enable efficient and effective tracking, recording and review of learners' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's vision is shared and promoted throughout the school. The culture of high expectations ensures that leaders at all levels contribute to ensuring all learners achieve their best and develop their independence and personal skills. The school continues to identify areas to improve the life chances of learners even further. The highly focused school development plan, including ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress, supports the senior leadership team's work effectively in moving the school forward. The school makes a significant contribution to community cohesion and has identified areas where this could be even more effective. The governing body provides excellent support for the headteacher and the school as a whole. The governors ensure safe recruitment and rigorously monitor spending. Recently, however, during

the period of new building and amalgamation, governors' monitoring of learners' progress has been less effective.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
---	----------------	-------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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	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	2	
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

23 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Riverside School, Orpington, BR5 3HS

I was one of two inspectors who visited your school recently. We wanted to see how well you are doing. Some of you told us how much you enjoy your education and how good the school is. We agree because:

- your school is excellent
- you make excellent progress
- your parents are very happy with the school
- the headteacher and all the staff look after you very well
- the school makes sure you have lots of exciting things to do
- you all seem so happy to be there!

The school could be even better if:

- there were even more courses for the older students
- the adults who act as governors for the school monitored the excellent progress you make.

Thank you, we had a good time at the school as well!

Yours faithfully

James Bowden

Lead Inspector