

Rowden House School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	884/6006
Unique Reference Number	117042
Inspection number	329415
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

Rowden House is located in rural Herefordshire and is a residential special school for young people, aged 11–19, with severe learning difficulties, challenging behaviour and associated autistic spectrum disorders. The vision of the school is to *'take young people on a journey from child to adult and to improve their communication, independence and lifeskills'*. Rowden House is also registered as a Children's Home, providing predominantly 52 week placements. Staff from the residential department work alongside teachers and support assistants during the school day. The school has a wide range of staff to support pupils' needs including therapists, psychologists and nurses. Since the last inspection there has been a new headteacher and head of education appointed. There has also been further investment and improvement of the facilities.

Evaluation of the school

Rowden House is a good school, which successfully achieves its aims. The school has improved well since the last inspection. The overall quality of education it provides is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and spiritual development is good. Pupils make good progress in developing their communication and independence skills and making improvements to their behaviour. The school is particularly effective at using assessment information concisely to demonstrate the progress pupils make year on year. The care provision was inspected by Ofsted in May 2008 where it was judged to be satisfactory, although pupils are well cared for in practice and treated with respect and dignity. The accommodation provides an attractive and conducive learning environment for pupils. The school meets all the regulations.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good. The good curriculum is well thought out and planned and is suitable for the needs and abilities of pupils. Policies for subjects are supported by thorough schemes of work to help teachers plan effectively. However, although a suitable scheme is in place, planning for information and communication technology (ICT) is not as well developed as for other subjects of the curriculum. Opportunities for pupils to achieve externally accredited awards are good and this is a strength of the school. Pupils of all abilities can achieve and experience success, which does much to promote their self-confidence and self-esteem. At Key Stage 4,

pupils work on 'transition challenge' awards and at post-16, they move on to achieving 'towards independence' awards. More able pupils are able to undertake an achievement certificate in life skills, which provides them with a greater level of challenge. Accreditation of courses is also being extended to pupils in Key Stage 3.

The personal, social and health education programme promotes pupils safety by focusing on their self-awareness and developing their understanding of their emotions. The ability for pupils to develop healthier lifestyles is restricted by the lack of choice they can make with regard to meals.

Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are provided for pupils through themed weeks and topics for modern foreign languages and history. Pupils use the local community facilities well, such as shops, cinemas and swimming pool in order to develop their independence and leisure skills. Visitors such as musicians and African drummers who visit the school provide additional experiences for pupils. The curriculum is enhanced by opportunities for music and pottery lessons. Cultural differences are celebrated and taught through various aspects of the curriculum such as music, art and cookery.

Pupils are well prepared for their next phase of life through work-related learning by participating in practical tasks aimed at developing independence skills either on the school site, such as collecting laundry, or where appropriate off-site, for example at a local cafe. Pupils who are able to, attend life skills courses such as cooking at a Further Education college.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers are skilled at using a good range of alternative means of communication to aid pupils' understanding. For example, effective use is made of symbols, signs and photographs and these are presented in a highly structured method. Teachers establish well-rehearsed routines and pupils respond well to this predictable structure. Relationships between staff and pupils are close and this is key in managing pupils' behaviour sensitively to avoid confrontation as much as possible. The school is aware that ICT can be better utilised, particularly as many pupils respond well to visual learning and are keen to introduce interactive whiteboards to enhance teaching and learning, but budgetary factors have constrained this. In one ICT lesson, pupils worked well on computers to record their work, although the lack of internet access restricted their abilities to research the topic. Teaching is strongest where learning is based on practical activities. For example, pupils enjoy experiences such as pottery, music and sport and leisure activities.

On occasions, less experienced staff tend to do too much for pupils in lessons, and this restricts their opportunities for development and independence. When the handover of care staff takes place during lessons, pupils and teachers find this too disruptive. Some teachers are relatively new or inexperienced and need further training to develop their skills, understanding and knowledge of best practice in teaching pupils with the most complex and severe learning needs. The range and quality of resources is good, although it is only satisfactory for ICT.

The school makes good use of assessment information, so that small steps of progress are carefully measured to inform teachers' planning. The school very effectively monitors pupils' progress and has developed a clear view of how much progress they make over time.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual moral social and cultural development is good. Pupils' enjoyment of school is demonstrated through their positive attitudes, the pleasure they get from receiving 'good work' certificates at the weekly rewards assemblies, or when they have completed a task independently. There are good relationships between pupils and adults and between pupils themselves. This contributes to a happy and caring learning environment. Through the positive behaviour management programme of rewards and sanctions, pupils' gain an understanding of the difference between right and wrong and are made aware of the impact of their behaviour on others. As a result, pupils' behaviour is good. Attendance is also good. Pupils are prepared well for the future through good social development, which is promoted well in school, in the residential provision and through the many links with the community. For example, pupils have regular shopping trips to a local supermarket and some swim at a local leisure centre. The school promotes pupils' spirituality well through the taught curriculum including lessons in personal social and health education where they learn about the environment and how to look after it, and through daily assemblies, where pupils learn about relationships and caring for others. Pupils generally show good levels of tolerance and respect for each other and participate in raising funds for local and national charities. For example, some have participated in a sponsored walk for McMillan Cancer and others have raised funds and prepared gifts for the annual Shoe Box charity.

The residential provision promotes pupils' independence and life skills effectively. Pupils' personal responsibility is developed well by carrying out small tasks where appropriate. Shared strategies for both behaviour and communication, across the school and residential units help to ensure consistent approaches for pupils to help them promote their personal development well.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory, although there are some good features. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good. Child protection arrangements are robust and an appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid. The school gives suitable attention to pupils' health by monitoring their weight and attending to any identified medical need. The school also takes appropriate account of those with religious dietary requirements. The most recent inspection of the care provision was judged to be satisfactory. Actions highlighted by the last inspection have been addressed, but the quality of the food is variable and pupils' choice of what they eat, is too limited. Pupils are supervised well in school and on trips locally

and further a field. The school's anti-bullying and behaviour policies are effectively implemented.

There is a written health and safety policy and there are appropriate policy and risk assessments for educational visits. Suitable risk assessments of the premises are adequate. An external provider undertakes annual fire checks and training for staff on fire safety is provided. Electrical and fire fighting equipment are routinely tested to ensure it is fully operational. The kitchen area where food is prepared is clean and hygienic. The school has drawn up a comprehensive three-year plan indicating how it will fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school complies fully with the regulations in respect of the checks it makes on prospective employees with regard to their identity and suitability to work with young people.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is set in 22 acres of attractive grounds and surroundings. These provide excellent opportunities for pupils to explore nature and participate in horticultural and gardening activities, as well as recreational and leisure activities. The accommodation is of a very high standard. It is well maintained and is well suited to the needs of pupils and the curriculum. Classrooms, although some are compact, are bright and attractive and are conducive to pupils' learning. The school has some excellent specialist areas. These include an ICT suite, art room, library, pool and sensory rooms. A new playground with safety surfacing, a sensory garden, a 'leisure barn' and residential facilities have been built since the time of the last inspection. However, the acoustics in the main hall are poor and is not suitable for music or singing activities. The residential accommodation provides a homely environment for pupils and each pupil has their own individual room, which is personalised for pupils as appropriate.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has produced an attractive prospectus which contains all relevant and essential information for new and prospective parents and carers. This information is also supplemented by school's own website. Parents and carers are kept well informed of the progress of their child, through an annual report and of any concerns the school may have regarding a child are raised quickly. Most parents' state they were kept well informed. Responses from placing authorities were very positive.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a comprehensive complaints policy. One formal complaint has been received over the last year. This has been investigated thoroughly and suitable

actions have been implemented. The school has developed a child friendly booklet to encourage pupils to voice their complaints, if they have any concerns.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the provision of interactive whiteboards and internet access to all classrooms
- improve teaching and learning by providing more training for inexperienced staff to increase their knowledge and expertise
- improve the quality and range of meal choices available for pupils.

School details

Name of school	Rowden House School		
DCSF number	884/6006		
Unique reference number	117042		
Type of school	Severe and profound learning difficulties		
Status	Independent Special		
Date school opened	1986		
Age range of pupils	11–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 33	Girls: 8	Total: 41
Number of boarders	Boys: 33	Girls: 8	Total: 41
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 33	Girls: 8	Total: 41
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 24	Girls: 6	Total: 30
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ N/A		
Annual fees (boarders)	£157,000 - £211,000		
Address of school	Rowden House Winslow Bromyard Herefordshire HR7 4LS		
Telephone number	01885 488096		
Fax number	01885 488336		
Email address	info@rowdenhouse.com; iangateley@rowdenhouse.com		
Headteacher	Mr I Gateley		
Proprietor	The SENAD Group Limited		
Reporting inspector	Frank Price		
Dates of inspection	10–11 June 2008		