

# Ripplevale School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell
Social care inspector	Liz Daniels

Age group: 7-16

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A<sup>1</sup> of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000<sup>3</sup> having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

## Information about the school

Ripplevale School is a residential special school which opened in 1970 and since its recent acquisition of a village school is now located on two sites in the village of Ripple, close to Deal in Kent. It is owned by the Ripplevale School Company's directors. Since the last education inspection in November 2006 it has increased its capacity to 60 boys, aged from 7 to 16. All pupils have statements of special educational needs related to either social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum condition. Some pupils have a combination of these special needs and others have additional learning needs related to literacy. There are currently 38 boys on roll, aged from 7 to 16 of whom 10 are weekly boarders. All pupils are referred by their local authorities. Approximately one quarter of pupils are looked after children'. The majority of pupils have experienced a fragmented education as a result of their special educational needs and their attainment on entry to the school is well below average. The last social care inspection was carried out in March 2009.

The school's stated aims are 'To provide good quality education... to maximise the full potential of each pupil within a caring and nurturing environment... with a moral code which emphasises personal responsibility and consideration of others through a partnership between pupils, parents and carers and staff.'

## Evaluation of the school

Ripplevale School is a good school which provides good quality care and education. It is successful in improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning, which prepares them well for life after school. The good quality of education has an appropriate focus on academic achievement and ensures that the pupils make good progress. The school cares well for its pupils and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. The school's leadership has maintained the impetus for improvement

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga\\_20000014\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1)

since the last inspection and almost all regulations are met. The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is good.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. A broad range of subjects is offered which takes close account of the National Curriculum in most respects. Detailed schemes of work contain explicit links to other subjects such as English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The length of the taught week has increased since the last inspection.

The curriculum covers all the required areas of learning and there is a strong emphasis on enabling the pupils to achieve academic success at GCSE and Entry Level in a broad range of subjects, including English language, English literature, mathematics and science. Accredited courses are also available in more practical subjects such as art and physical education (PE). In keeping with the school's stated purpose to maximise academic potential, where appropriate, pupils may take GCSE examinations earlier than usual. The majority of pupils make good progress in view of their starting points, and most leave with at least six accredited awards. Onward destinations to colleges of further education and employment indicate that the curriculum makes a good contribution to the pupils' future economic well-being.

A number of pupils' statements of special educational needs require that they have full access to the National Curriculum and occasionally to specific programmes related to autistic spectrum. However, there are currently no opportunities for pupils to study a modern foreign language and few timetabled lessons for individual support.

An appropriate personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is in place which includes relevant topics on keeping safe, sex education, exploring feelings and establishing positive relationships. The 'lifeskills' programme is supported effectively by both care and education staff and provides strong support for the boarders' 24 hours curriculum. A strong focus on the faiths, beliefs and cultures of others is provided effectively through ethics lessons. Careers education and guidance are provided at the appropriate stage and include links with relevant Connexions offices.

The range of extra-curricular activities available to boarders is outstanding, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Access to these activities by day pupils is possible but transport difficulties reduce their uptake, and extra-curricular activities at lunchtime are limited.

The quality of teaching is good and all staff enjoy good relationships with the pupils. Teachers have high levels of subject expertise and benefit from training in their subjects and behaviour management. Senior leaders recognise that similar levels of expertise in specific special educational needs are possessed by only a minority of staff, for example, in dyslexia and teaching strategies for the increasing number of

autistic spectrum learners. The main strategy for meeting the wide range of need in classrooms is varying levels of adult support. The best lessons also have clearly different levels of work for different abilities; however, this is not always apparent in all lessons.

In lessons, most pupils show good attitudes to learning. Teachers make strenuous efforts to make learning relevant to the pupils' emotional needs. For example, in English, pupils are encouraged to reflect on the moral issues of character and conscience in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, respectively. Practical investigations in science are hugely enjoyed by pupils of all ages and they show a good knowledge of safety matters. Relevant protocols for supporting learning are provided and consequently effective support is provided by teaching assistants, some of whom are also care staff. This team approach ensures that all learners are well known and gives the pupils additional security and confidence in learning. The best examples of support are evident when all adults take an active part in learning, such as reading books and assisting with experiments. The lack of appropriate clothing for physical activity worn by some staff reduces their effectiveness when supporting the otherwise outstanding PE lessons. Throughout the school, teachers' use of ICT has improved since the last inspection.

The use of assessment has improved since the last inspection and some teachers use 'small steps' assessment procedures to measure progress within attainment levels. Assessment information is displayed in most classrooms, although not all rooms display significant amounts of pupils' work to inform and motivate other learners. Routine end-of-year subject evaluations are at an early stage. Nevertheless, the school now has a much clearer view of its effectiveness in meeting pupils' academic and personal development needs.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is successful in its aim to provide a caring and nurturing environment with an emphasis on moral development and personal responsibility. Typically, the environment on both sites is calm and pupils work purposefully. The staff provide good role models and offer pupils a consistent approach to management of their behaviour. Pupils are aware of the school systems for rewards and sanctions and the majority respond well. Consequently, pupils develop a good attitude to learning and enjoy attending school. The majority are unaffected by occasional poor behaviour and focus on their own behavioural targets to maintain their studies.

Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community through the school council. Some have specific roles, for example, acting as safety officer in science lessons to ensure that their peers wear goggles. Self-assessment of their work is at an early stage. Horticultural activities result in some pupils providing vegetables for the school kitchen and thereby develop enterprise skills.

In the local community, some pupils tend the remembrance garden at Deal Castle and their service is recognised by awards from the Burma Star Association. Fund-raising for others, including support for a child in Africa, assists their understanding of others less fortunate. The programmes for PSHE, life skills and careers support the pupils' personal development well and their knowledge of public services is good. Well planned assemblies enable the pupils to consider topical issues such as cyber-bullying, and this helps them to stay safe. Pupils learn about world religions and faiths through the ethics curriculum, which supports their spiritual development well, although first-hand visits to a range of places of worship and public institutions have been limited. Racial harmony is a feature of school life.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The quality of the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. Risk assessments are routinely carried out to ensure that pupils are kept safe in school and while on visits to the community. The policies and procedures relating to the welfare and care of pupils meet all the regulations and most are reviewed as required. These include the health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour, anti-bullying and safeguarding. The members of staff responsible for safeguarding and child protection have appropriate levels of training and the relevant arrangements are secure. All staff receive a comprehensive induction programme including safe restraint, first aid and behaviour management techniques. The planned programmes for PSHE and physical activities help to ensure that all the pupils are encouraged to stay healthy and safe. Pupils enjoy freshly cooked meals and are encouraged to take regular exercise. The high staffing ratios, including deployment of care staff, ensure that the staff know the pupils well. Pupils recognise this and report that they feel well cared for and are confident they can turn to a staff member for help if they need to. Any instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively by the school. The school's recent revision to its accessibility plan ensures it meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school makes comprehensive checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children in the school and residential provision. The school maintains relevant evidence of these checks and keeps all of the required information in a single central register.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are suitable to ensure safe and effective learning. Boarders live on site in a large, detached house that provides well for their needs. The recent acquisition of a former local authority primary school in the village offers a high quality learning environment. All areas of the school are adequately maintained and classrooms are of suitable size for the numbers of pupils in each class. Most classrooms on the main site support specific subject areas and are

suitably equipped. Both sites have suitable areas for safe play. The main school grounds are extensive and enable the school to enjoy sporting links with other schools that include team games and cross-country running. The gym extension is nearing completion and enhances the sporting facilities considerably. Effective use is made of the grounds in support of horticultural studies.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others meets all of the regulations except the requirement to send financial information annually to referring local authorities. The vast majority of parents and all local authorities report that they are happy with the work of the school, although a minority wished more homework could be provided. Parents acknowledge the effective role of the dedicated family liaison person. Academic and other reports to support reviews are completed on a timely basis and are of satisfactory quality. Occasionally, some subject reports focus too much on behaviour and give too little information about the pupils' future targets and progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding in subjects. The school does not currently receive written progress reports for those pupils who attend courses at a local college of further education. The school anticipates that its new website will be live before the end of term.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy and procedures meet the requirements and are followed rigorously.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision is good and most of the key national minimum standards are met. One outcome area is judged as outstanding and the remaining five are good.

Pupils' good health is promoted while they stay at the school. Health needs are identified and good arrangements enable each pupil to receive the medical, dental and optical care they require. First aid is well managed and staff are also trained in the management of medications. However, there are not written protocols for the administration of non-prescription medication or consents for all the medications administered; there are also some shortfalls in medication record keeping.

An enthusiastic and experienced catering team deliver a choice of meals for the pupils. Menus are well publicised and can be flexible to meet individual requests. Although currently no pupil requires a specialised diet, the staff are able to cater for dietary preferences.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff understand and respect the individual needs of pupils and offer them excellent support. They recognise that they

need privacy and understand how to maintain confidentiality. However, a board with details about the pupils is displayed in the care office, where the pupils make private phone calls.

The pupils know how to make a complaint and good records of these are kept. However, many concerns are managed effectively through discussion; these are not all logged, and as a result the good work done is not captured and the frequency and common themes are difficult to determine.

Keeping pupils safe is regarded as a priority. Staff are trained in child protection and appropriate policies and procedures ensure that any concerns are coordinated through a named staff member for safeguarding. Visitors are well monitored and good recruitment processes are employed. The small size of the boarding community means that staff are aware of each pupil's needs. If bullying occurs the pupils are clear that the staff manage it, as well as offering support to the victim and guidance for the perpetrator. Behaviour is well managed; there is a strong ethos of reward but the pupils understand the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. All staff are trained in suitable behaviour management techniques and good records are kept of any incidents. Appropriate bound books are used to record physical interventions and sanctions, although the logs do not include all the required information.

The school has all the necessary service contracts and risk assessments. Health and safety concerns are generally well managed, although some windows within the residential area are not restricted, presenting a risk for pupils. Good measures are undertaken for fire safety, although the proprietors need to review the operation of one fire door. Fire drills are now held regularly; however, as the names of those involved are not recorded, it is unclear which care staff and pupils have practised an evacuation.

The residences provide a restful, homely environment and the care staff support the pupils in their daily routines, enabling them to attend education. The excellent choice and good supervision of activities means that the pupils find boarding both interesting and enjoyable.

The school values the views of the pupils and makes use of formal arenas such as the school council and boarding meetings, as well as informal discussions with staff. Individual support for each pupil is a strength of the boarding provision and meeting individual needs to enable the pupils to achieve is seen as important. Reviews demonstrate that the pupils benefit from being at the school as clearly lots of good work is being done. Individual targets are set and these provide a focus for care each week, although the detail of the care given is not always captured in the pupils' care plans.

Comprehensive information which identifies the school's purpose is available for parents, staff and pupils. A caring, experienced and qualified staff team support the pupils in the residential area and sufficient staff are rostered. Formal and informal



supervision, as well as an appraisal process, ensure that the staff are supported and monitored, although as records are not all dated the frequency of some supervision is unclear. The school actively supports the staff with training, although the current method of recording it makes it difficult to identify whether any training has lapsed.

The organisation of boarding is good and is aided by excellent communication between the senior management team and the school's directors to ensure a daily awareness of any significant events. The residential provision and the welfare of the pupils who stay are seen as an integral part of the school. A director visits the residential provision twice a term and good reports are produced. Internal monitoring has been delegated to the appropriate personnel and overseen by the principal and directors. However, as some records do not fully reflect all that happens, some trends and themes may not be picked up.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>4</sup>

- where pupils have a statement of special educational needs, ensure that the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 1(2)(e))
- ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the needs of pupils on the autistic spectrum and ensure that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- submit an annual account to local authorities, and on request to the Secretary of State, of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of pupils funded by those local authorities (paragraph 6(8)).

In order to meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated regulations, the school must:

- ensure that a written record is kept of all medication given to pupils which includes all the required details and is regularly monitored by a senior member of staff (national minimum standard 14.20)
- consider how information about individuals can be protected when pupils use the care office to make private phone calls, to ensure confidentiality is maintained (national minimum standard 3)
- ensure that the records of physical intervention and sanctions include all the information required (national minimum standard 10)
- review the occasional locking of an internal fire door (national minimum standard 26 and 23)
- ensure windows above the ground floor are restricted to reduce the risk of pupils falling (national minimum standard 26)

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<sup>4</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)

- record the details of all those involved in fire drills whereby the school can confirm that all the residential care staff as well as the pupils know the evacuation procedures and have regularly practised them through fire drills (national minimum standard 26.5).

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that the activities provided in all lessons take full account of the pupils' different abilities
- consider widening the range of extra-curricular activities for day pupils who cannot access the excellent programme for boarders
- improve the quality of academic reporting, including college experiences, to match the best examples in the school.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	Ripplevale School	
DCSF number	886/6047	
Unique reference number	118995	
Type of school	Residential special school	
Status	Independent	
Date school opened	September 1970	
Age range of pupils	7-16	
Gender of pupils	Male	
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 38	Total: 38
Number of boarders	Boys: 9	Total: 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 38	Total: 38
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 10	Total: 10
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,315	
Annual fees (boarders)	£61,743	
Address of school	Chapel Lane Ripple Deal Kent CT14 8JG	
Telephone number	01304 373 866	
Fax number	01304 381 011	
Email address	info@ripplevaleschool.co.uk	
Principal	Mr Ted Schofield	
Proprietors	Mr Cliff Davies and Mr Chris Danican	
Reporting inspector	Mr Greg Sorrell	
Dates of inspection	17-18 November 2009	