

Rowhill School

Main Road, Longfield, Kent DA3 7PW

Inspection dates

22–23 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The aspirational headteacher has led continuous improvement since the last inspection, supported well by the capable senior leadership team.
- Staff provide exemplary care for pupils. They consistently apply the school's carefully considered behaviour, welfare and safeguarding policies. This keeps pupils safe at school and helps them to feel safe, boosting pupils' confidence and helping them to learn well.
- Most teaching is consistently good. Teaching is sometimes outstanding. As a result, pupils make good progress from typically low starting points when they join the school. This includes pupils supported by the pupil premium and the most able secondary pupils. (The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils entitled to free schools meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and developing rapidly in its scope, particularly at key stage 4. Throughout the school, pupils' literacy and mathematical skills are developed well through other subjects. Pupils are taught well about life in modern Britain and prepared well for the next stages in their education.
- Pupils usually behave well during lessons, around the school and at social times. Leaders ensure that pupils learn the importance of respect for themselves and others.
- Governors understand the needs of the pupils well, so they are rightly trusted by leaders when holding them to account. Governors' oversight of the school's finances, safeguarding and staffing is well informed and conscientious.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Specific aspects of teaching are not consistently of the highest order, particularly the way adults use questions to promote pupils' learning, and the management of lessons in the secondary phase.
- The most able pupils in key stage 2 are not challenged consistently well to excel.
- Governors' processes to hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes are efficient, but less well developed than other areas of their work.
- Recent improvements in pupils' attendance and reductions in exclusion, while significant, are not yet sustained.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently manage pupils' movement between activities during lessons well, and adapt lessons promptly when pupils' attention drifts, to regain their attention
 - adults consistently expect pupils to answer the questions they ask, giving pupils' suitable thinking time and encouragement to do so
 - the most able key stage 2 pupils are consistently challenged, and given appropriate opportunities to achieve the learning of which they are capable.
- Improve pupils' attendance by ensuring that the current success in improving individual pupils' attendance and reducing exclusions is sustained and extended.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that governors further develop their systems to hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher's unequivocal ambition for the success of every pupil is keenly shared and supported well by the capable senior leadership team. Staff also share this vision and work tirelessly to show pupils that they matter and can succeed. Senior leaders have led considerable improvement since the last inspection.
- Leaders regularly review information about pupils' achievement, honestly analysing where pupils are doing well and where their learning can improve further. As a result, senior leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement is accurate. The school's development plans set out relevant actions with ambitious timescales, and show clearly the contribution expected of members of staff.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have taken a robust and supportive approach to ensure that good and better teaching is evident throughout the school. Through their regular checks, leaders identify strengths in teaching, which are shared well to lift the quality of the rest. Leaders correctly identify specific aspects of teaching which are not yet consistently good or better, and take effective action to secure development. The headteacher ensures that teachers' performance management is closely linked to pupils' outcomes and the school's priorities.
- The curriculum is wide ranging and adapted well by leaders to meet pupils' needs. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 access all the subjects of the national curriculum. Leaders have developed pupils' opportunities in key stage 4 considerably since the last inspection. As a result, pupils, including the most able, now access a suitable range of vocational and academic qualifications. Leaders ensure that adults focus on developing pupils' communication, literacy and numeracy skills throughout their learning. They have wisely recruited specialist teachers to boost pupils' experience of music and sport.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Secondary assembly themes are based on an 'alphabet of values', recently focused on honesty. Creative weeks allow pupils to use their imagination, including by making art and sculpture. A beautifully crafted fish sculpture hangs in the central area of the school, made by pupils after reflecting on the moral tale 'Tobias and the angel'. Pupils' experience and achievement in art are established strengths of the school. Pupils are supported through the school's 'four Ws' to reflect on the consequences of their behaviour: what went wrong, what rule did I break, why did I do it, and what can I do to sort it out? Pupils have ample opportunities to contribute to the school community, for example by serving on the school council, gardening or running the breaktime tuckshop.
- Pupils learn well about life in modern Britain. The fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance are promoted well. Religious education lessons introduce pupils to the major faiths represented in the United Kingdom. Creative weeks include opportunities such as African drumming and Chinese cookery. Educational visits using public transport bring pupils into regular contact with wider society, for example in London. Pupils learn about British democracy and national history during visits to the Houses of Parliament and to see the changing of the guard. A display in the hall reminds pupils daily of the 'three Rs' they should observe: 'respect for myself, respect for others and respect for the school'. Inspectors were very impressed with pupils' tolerance of one another's individual character traits, fostered tirelessly by leaders and staff.
- The pupil premium is used well to promote pupils' welfare and progress. As a result, there are no notable differences between the overall achievement of these pupils and that of others at the school. Counselling, additional teaching and outdoor activities during school time are funded usefully through this premium. This provision has supported individual pupils to improve their attendance significantly, helping some to make better progress than their peers.
- Leaders ensure that additional government funding for primary school sport is used well. The employment of a specialist teacher has enriched the physical education programme to include archery and trampoline skills, for example. Pupils' participation in sports competitions has been extended through the funding of transport to events. Pupils value the extended range of after-school activities, including football, cycling and basketball.
- Since the last inspection, the local authority has supported the continuing improvement of the school well. Advisers' advice and guidance are highly valued by senior leaders and governors. The local authority's delegation to the school (of responsibility for managing the specialist teaching service) shows officers' confidence in the school's leadership.

- Leaders are outward looking, taking a leading role in the recent formation of a collaborative trust of special schools in north Kent. Leaders are making a central contribution to the development of new systems for assessing and recording pupils' achievement in this group of schools.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are well informed about the special educational needs or disability of the school's pupils. They actively promote the school's vision of excellence by ensuring that pupils are kept safe. They also ensure that leadership and staffing are suitably structured to meet pupils' needs and drive forward continuing improvement, and that the school's premises and resources are well managed. Governors visit the school regularly to discuss these aspects with leaders. Governors ensure that the pupil premium and additional sports funding are used effectively.
 - Governors are increasingly well informed about the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. In meetings, governors discuss the regular detailed reports provided by the headteacher. Sensibly, governors look to local authority advice to validate this information. However, governors' systems for obtaining first-hand information, to inform their understanding of leaders' reports about teaching and pupils' outcomes, are in the early stages of development.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff and governors are alert to the vulnerability of the school's pupils due to their special educational needs or disability. Staff patiently care for all the pupils, rightly winning pupils' trust and confidence. Up-to-date safeguarding policies and training are rigorously maintained. As a result, staff recognise and report any concerns promptly. Leaders take any concerns seriously and work tirelessly with external agencies such as the police or social services to support pupils and their families appropriately. Relevant risk assessments are completed, for example to support pupils' attendance at alternative provision, or to help staff manage identified risks at the school or during educational visits. Supervision in lessons, at lesson changeovers and during social times, is ample and attentive. Qualified first-aiders are available to deal with minor injuries. Parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, or speaking with inspectors, were overwhelmingly confident that pupils are safe and happy at school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Staff know and understand pupils' learning needs well. Although limited information is sometimes provided about pupils' previous education, leaders ensure that pupils' needs are fully assessed when they join the school. Appropriate provision is then set out in well-considered plans. This supports teachers to plan learning that is specifically suitable to each pupil, supporting good progress immediately from the time that pupils join the school.
- Staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils know that staff want them to succeed. Relationships of trust between pupils and staff create a positive atmosphere in classrooms and around the school. Inspectors observed no lost time during lessons in key stage 2, due to pupils' good behaviour.
- Teachers' regular, ongoing assessment of pupils' progress accurately informs their plans for teaching and classroom activities. As a result, these are well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers carefully consider which approach will help pupils to learn best, for example whether the particular lesson or activity should be practical or taught. This supports pupils' good progress.
- Teachers use subject vocabulary precisely, particularly in mathematics and science lessons. During physical education in key stage 2, staff take opportunities to develop pupils' everyday language such as up, down, in front and behind. This helps accelerate pupils' language development and their understanding of concepts.
- Staff expect pupils to take their learning seriously, helping them to develop good attitudes to education. In secondary science lessons, for example, pupils wear laboratory coats and are reminded how to stay safe during their experiments. In a key stage 2 mathematics lesson, inspectors saw pupils being expected to use equipment for measuring capacity carefully, and to be sensible with the rice and water they were measuring. Furthermore, teachers purposefully devise activities that they know pupils will enjoy, motivating pupils to engage well. An example was seen by inspectors in key stage 4, where pupils enthusiastically took part in role-play exercises to prepare for interviews at college or in the workplace.
- Teaching assistants provide skilled and patient support, often working successfully with pupils away from the teacher. This includes during one-to-one interventions, particularly in English and mathematics.

- Phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) is taught systematically and successfully throughout the school. Teachers use a beneficial and similarly systematic approach when teaching mathematical skills to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Teachers consistently emphasise the development of pupils' English skills, particularly when feeding back to pupils on all their work. Frequent opportunities are created for pupils to develop their mathematical skills, for example when drawing charts and graphs to record their findings in science.
- Teachers usually observe pupils carefully as they work during lessons, and adapt the lesson readily to maintain pupils' attention if this starts to drift. However, inspectors found that this was not always the case. In addition, leaders have rightly identified that teachers do not consistently manage changes during lessons well, at times having to pause teaching to manage the minor behavioural issues that may arise as pupils move from one activity to the next.
- Staff are well trained in the use of questions to stimulate pupils' thinking and to check their understanding. However, staff do not consistently allow pupils the time they need to consider their answer, limiting the benefits of this approach at times, including for the development of pupils' communication skills and confidence.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school's well-developed safeguarding and behaviour policies, including for the prevention of bullying, are applied consistently by staff. Staff remain calm in the face of any challenging behaviour, and support one another well to defuse the situation and help the pupil make amends. Pupils learn respect from the unswerving example of all the adults and understand the importance of following this good example.
- The personal and social education programme supports secondary pupils well to develop their communication and confidence, and includes helpful careers advice and guidance. Music therapy enriches individual pupils' personal development. The school's breakfast club provides a calm and sociable start to the day for those who attend.
- Pupils trust staff to listen to them and treat them fairly. Pupils' views are recorded when incidents are investigated. Pupils show that they understand the importance of being honest in order to resolve problems.
- Pupils value opportunities to take responsibility and make a contribution to the school community or beyond. School council members in key stage 2 proudly wear their distinctive red sweatshirts. Pupils organise charity days, for example recently for an organisation that helps people who are homeless. Pupils help organise school events such as the recent street party for the Queen's 90th birthday. Pupils make cakes and undertake gardening to support the elderly residents of a local care home.
- Most pupils wear their uniform with pride. Voluntary homework is set, and pupils who complete this value the recognition they receive, for example in assembly. A minority of parents expressed the view to inspectors that the school should be stricter about uniform and homework, particularly to help prepare older pupils for further education or the world of work.
- Leaders maintain close contact with pupils who attend alternative provision, carefully monitoring their progress and welfare. Leaders of alternative education provision who spoke with inspectors were impressed with the care and attention for pupils maintained by Rowhill staff, including the monitoring of pupils' attendance.
- Leaders are rightly sensitive to the particular needs of the very low number of girls who attend the school. Specific support groups for the girls, and the sensitive attention of female staff, ensure that girls have ready support whenever they need it. Leaders make very effective use of external agencies to help boys and girls consider relevant themes, such as their rights and responsibilities within relationships.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils usually behave well during lessons and around the school, due to the effective supervision of staff and their careful attention to pupils' needs. Pupils show respect for the school and the equipment they use. Pupils were proud to show one of the inspectors the nature area developed on the edge of the school field, where they can explore the natural environment. When bicycles and other equipment are provided for key stage 2 pupils at breaktime, these are used safely and with due consideration for others.

Attentive staff usually pre-empt any problems between pupils. If arguments do break out, these are usually resolved peacefully.

- Pupils' overall attendance is in line with the average figure for special schools nationally. However, rates of persistent absence by individual pupils, and the frequency of exclusions, are higher. Very effective work by leaders is improving the attendance and behaviour of individual pupils causing most concern, in some cases significantly. However, it is too soon to see whether this improvement is sustained.
- The overwhelming majority of staff responding to Ofsted's online staff survey are confident that leaders and staff manage pupils' behaviour well. A very small minority differed in their view about this. Inspectors found that leaders and staff manage pupils' behaviour well, never giving up in their attempts to help pupils succeed.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- The proportion of Year 11 pupils who achieve national qualifications has increased significantly since the last inspection. In addition, the standard and range of qualifications obtained by pupils have improved. Between 2013 and 2015, the number of GCSE passes at the school rose from five to 29. In 2013, the only GCSE qualification offered was mathematics. This year, pupils have been entered for GCSE qualifications in mathematics, English, science, art and music. Significantly, the proportion of pupils who gain GCSE passes in English and mathematics is rising steadily year on year.
- The increase in GCSE entries and passes shows the school making good provision for the most able pupils in the secondary phase. Pupils in alternative provision are supported well to access vocational and GCSE qualifications.
- In 2013, most Year 11 pupils entered for vocational qualifications obtained entry-level certificates. In 2015, most pupils entered for vocational qualifications obtained the higher, level 1 awards. This trend is set to continue this year, with pupils entered for some level 2 qualifications, for example in food technology.
- Pupils' improving achievement at the end of key stage 4 reflects the ambition and determination of staff for pupils to succeed and be well prepared for the next stage in their education. Secondary-aged pupils at the school typically have significant learning difficulties, in addition to their emotional and mental health needs, communication difficulties or autism.
- The percentage of Year 11 pupils who move on to further education in colleges or sixth forms is 95%. This year, pupils are planning to take up qualifications in construction, motor mechanics, hair and beauty, music, and drama. For the first time, students are considering taking up apprenticeships when they leave. Owing to the school's good preparation, Rowhill students sustain their post-16 placements as well as other pupils in special schools do nationally.
- In key stage 3, the work seen in pupils' books, and teachers' assessments, show that pupils make good progress from very low starting points. Pupils in key stage 3 are supported well to continue developing their English and mathematical skills throughout their learning.
- Pupils in key stage 2 often enter the school after significant periods of not attending school, or of being taught one to one, away from their class. Inspectors saw striking examples of pupils, only recently admitted to Rowhill, already settled well to learning within class lessons. Some of these pupils' work books show very good progress, including pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Key stage 2 pupils generally make good progress. However, pupils admitted to key stage 2 do not typically have learning difficulties in addition to their emotional and behavioural needs. Leaders have rightly recognised that the most able primary-aged pupils do not always attain the learning of which they are capable.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium are in the majority at the school. There are no notable differences between the achievement of these pupils and that of others, except for individuals who make better progress than their peers as a result of the carefully planned additional support they receive.
- Staff are sensitive to the needs of the minority of girls in the school. Boys and girls make equally good progress overall.

School details

Unique reference number	119045
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10012302

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynda Baxter
Headteacher	Tim South
Telephone number	01474 705377
Website	www.rowhill.sch.kent.uk
Email address	secretary@rowhill.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April–1 May 2014

Information about this school

- Rowhill is larger than the average-sized special school. The vast majority of pupils are boys.
- The school serves pupils aged seven to 16 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Secondary-aged pupils also have cognition and learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils have additional needs associated with autism or communication difficulties, for example. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is organised in two phases: primary and secondary. Firm plans are established to offer provision for pupils aged 16 years and over, from September 2016.
- Many pupils receive help from other agencies, such as social services, the youth offending service and child and adolescent mental health services. Approximately 10% of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- Very few pupils live locally to the school. The vast majority use school transport to travel to and from school each day.
- There are 75% of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority).
- Almost without exception, pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very small.
- Some secondary-aged pupils receive part of their education with other providers, such as Challenger Troop and Write Trak.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club on site.
- The school manages the local authority's specialist teaching and learning services, which are based on the premises. This service provides specialist teaching to pupils with special educational needs or disability in north Kent schools, and training and support for staff.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching throughout the school, including joint observations with a deputy headteacher and the head of the secondary phase. Inspectors looked at pupils' work during lessons and on display, and examined samples of pupils' work from all the key stages.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. A telephone discussion was held with the chair of the governing body and inspectors met with another governor. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors spoke on the telephone with the leader of one of the alternative education providers used by the school.
- Parents' views were considered through the 66 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and in conversations with parents attending a celebration event on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors considered the two responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and held separate meetings with primary- and secondary-aged pupils. Inspectors observed morning breaks and lunchtime, attended a primary phase assembly, and talked with pupils around the school. The views of staff were considered through the 44 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plans; information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour, and leaders' checks on teaching; governing body records; and local authority reports. The school's safeguarding records were examined, including records of physical intervention by staff and the central record of recruitment checks on staff.

Inspection team

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Janet Tomkins

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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