

Rowden House School

Rowden House, Winslow, Bromyard, HR7 4LS

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| Inspection dates | 7–9 October 2014 | |
| Overall effectiveness | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | Good | 2 |
| Sixth form provision | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- The school's arrangements to keep students safe and secure are outstanding. Staff are highly committed to their students and repeatedly go the extra mile to support them. Parents and carers endorse this.
- Students achieve well, often after significant periods out of education before joining the school. They successfully acquire the self-confidence and will to succeed and make good progress towards challenging but achievable targets.
- Students make good gains in their communication, literacy and numeracy skills. They successfully complete nationally accredited courses that help prepare them for life in the community.
- The quality of teaching is good and improving. A good range of learning experiences, coupled with high expectations of what students can achieve, are driving up achievement.
- Students make good gains in managing their own behaviour as they settle into school routines and experience success in learning.
- The sixth form provision is good. Students' transition to the next stage of their lives is well supported.
- The school's leaders are successfully developing a culture and ethos that is enabling students to make sustained progress and achieve well; much has already been done and they recognise where further improvement is needed.
- The proprietor regularly checks the work of the school and holds leaders closely to account for all its work.
- The school's leaders have ensured good improvement since the last inspection. They clearly demonstrate their capacity to achieve the excellence for which they are striving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In planning lessons, teachers do not always focus precisely enough on students' learning and progress.
- Occasionally, students' concentration in lessons dips because the links between learning activities are not sufficiently smooth or challenging.
- When giving students feedback on their work or explaining the next steps in learning, teachers sometimes give students too much information for them to understand at one time.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The school was inspected with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed six lessons taught by five teachers and visited all classes a second time as part of a learning tour to focus on specific aspects of students' learning. All observations were conducted jointly with either the headteacher or head of learning.
- A number of school policies and procedures were scrutinised and discussions held with senior leaders about the implementation of these. Discussions were also held with the proprietor's officers.
- Discussions were held with three parents and a representative of a placing local authority. A range of students' work, together with records of the monitoring and mentoring of teaching and learning, were discussed. Students' views were canvassed through the results of recent class discussions.
- The inspector considered 13 responses to a staff questionnaire. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire to be considered.
- An aligned inspection of the children's home on the school campus was conducted by Ofsted's social care inspectors. The findings of this inspection are published separately.

Inspection team

Michael Best, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rowden House School is an independent special school for boys and girls who have severe learning difficulties, typically with challenging behaviour. The school is registered to admit up to 48 students aged 11 to 19 years, but numbers are reducing as the complexity of students' needs is increasing. Students are admitted at any age and may join the school at different points in the school year.
- The school is owned and managed by the SENAD group which has several other establishments providing education and care for students and adults with learning difficulties. The school opened in 1986. It was registered in July 2009 as a children's home as it provides residency for up to 52 weeks a year. The children's home comprises a number of residences on the school campus.
- There are currently 13 students on the school roll, aged 14 to 19 years; seven of these students are looked after by their local authority. All but one of the students live on the school campus.
- Some local authorities pass on pupil premium payments in addition to meetings students' fees. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students who are entitled to free school meals or who are looked after by their local authority.
- All students have a statement of their special educational needs and are funded by local authorities. Every student has a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) or global learning delay. Many students have complex mental health needs and/or other medical conditions. The school offers a fixed-term assessment provision for highly complex individuals.
- Many students are disaffected with learning prior to admission, having poor attendance and presenting high levels of classroom disruption; this has typically resulted in slow rates of progression and/or being at risk of permanent exclusion in their previous placements.
- Most students are White British and all use English as their principal language.
- A new Principal, designated as the headteacher, was appointed in February 2013. A new head of learning was appointed at the same time. There have been a number of other changes in staffing since the previous inspection.
- The school's previous education inspection was in November 2011 with a monitoring visit in October 2012. The last previous social care inspection took place in June 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, and thus raise achievement further, by:
 - making sure that, when planning and teaching lessons, students' targets always focus precisely on learning and progress
 - ensuring that students move seamlessly from one learning activity to another by having all learning resources to hand and not allowing students' concentration and application to learning to lapse
 - consistently providing well-focused and specific guidance in lessons and when marking students' work, about what they need to improve and their next steps in learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school has made good progress since the previous inspection as the result of the strong and inspiring leadership of the headteacher and head of learning in building and developing an effective team of highly committed and effective classroom practitioners. They are supported by a resourceful team of administrative, catering and maintenance staff who ensure that the school runs efficiently on a day-to-day basis.
- The school's self-evaluation of its work is honest and accurate, and the school development plan's priorities are well focused on students' achievement becoming outstanding. The impact of leaders' work to achieve their challengingly high expectations has still to be fully realised; that said, the school is securely on its journey to excellence and the capacity to complete this is reflected in the significant improvements already made in pupils' achievement. All the requirements for continuing registration as an independent school are met.
- In their responses to the inspection questionnaire, all staff said they were proud to work at the school. Relationships between staff are good. Staff members are keen to gain additional skills and experience through further training in order to be as effective as possible.
- Strong and effective leadership of teaching is successfully promoting students' quality learning and accelerating their progress. Leaders have established robust systems for collecting and recording information about students' needs, interests and progress so that expectations of what each student can achieve during their time in the school can be challenging, yet realistic. Regular and rigorous checking on the quality of teaching, coupled with well-focused mentoring from an experienced teacher, has brought about a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and students' learning since the last inspection, and forms a secure basis for further improvement.
- The leadership recognises the staff's capacity for outstanding practice and focuses their support through effective procedures for the management of staff performance that closely reflect the national Teaching Standards. The incidence of teaching that requires improvement is falling and an increasing proportion of teaching has outstanding features: leaders are now rightly focused on helping teachers to make their practice outstanding so that students consistently make the best possible progress.
- Alongside developments in teaching, leaders have successfully managed improvements in students' attendance and behaviour. This has been achieved during a period when students joining the school are presenting increasingly complex needs. Close links with students' residences ensure that there is a regular and purposeful exchange of information at the start and end of each school day. Leaders have set high but manageable targets and ensured that these are underpinned by suitable support for, and rewards that are understood and appreciated by, students. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of serious incidents.
- The school has a very accurate picture of students' starting points and is thus able to set challenging but achievable targets for each individual. Students are taught individually or in small groups, with a carefully planned and individual transition programme run for those that are new to the school, including who have previously been out of full-time education and need to build up their resilience for learning.
- Students' progress is closely checked by senior leaders and the proprietor; the school's assessment procedures are straightforward, well implemented and effectively used. Information is shared with staff, carers and parents. In discussion, one parent commented positively on the depth and quality of the verbal reports she has regularly received about her son's progress since joining the school. Records show that, once they have settled in to their new surroundings, students new to the school often make rapid progress and start to make good the gaps in their prior learning.
- As a result of the quality of the information the school has about each student, staff are able to tailor individual programmes that enable the most able to be stretched and the least able to reach their potential. These programmes are closely aligned to the requirements set out in students' statements of special educational needs. The school maintains close links with placing local authorities and contributes

to annual reviews.

- The school successfully provides students with experience in all the required areas of learning. There is a good balance of activities that build students' communication, literary and numeracy skills and those that broaden their capacity to apply these in everyday situations. For example, students regularly go shopping in Bromyard or beyond; during the inspection, one group visited a local garden centre to buy fruit and vegetables for the forthcoming harvest festival. As part of their visit, they visited the café and bought themselves a drink and snack. Students' progress is well supported by speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists who work closely with school staff in supporting students in therapy sessions and contributing to individual learning plans.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students reflect the latest national guidance and are robustly implemented. The designated lead for safeguarding is supported by a number of other staff trained at the higher level. Safe recruitment practices are systematically implemented. The school makes all the required checks on adults having contact with students and these are fully recorded in a single central register, as required. The school has appropriate procedures in place for confirming the identity of any agency staff and these checks are suitably recorded.
- The premises of and accommodation at the school are well suited to the needs of students and are well maintained. The school provides all the required information for parents, carers and others, together with an appropriate complaints procedure. There were no formal complaints in the last reporting period.

- **The governance of the school:**

The proprietor regularly checks the work of the school on visits and through the analysis of reports and data; these outcomes contribute to the school's self-evaluation and developmental planning process. The headteacher and staff are well supported and held rigorously to account for their work. The proprietor takes a keen interest in the progress and achievement of each student, and assiduously monitors improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. On visits, data is checked against students' work and assessment records and, where appropriate, targets are adjusted.

The proprietor ensures that the management of staff performance is robust and that professional development is supported through school-based mentoring and external courses. Support for newly qualified teachers is provided in conjunction with the local teaching partnership.

The school's safeguarding procedures are regularly reviewed. The school's compliance with the independent school regulations is regularly reviewed and all statutory duties are fulfilled. The proprietor successfully ensures that the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction are maintained and that students are successfully prepared for life in modern Britain.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Many students join the school with extremely challenging behaviour. However, as they make the transition into the school's routines and make progress in their learning, their behaviour improves, often significantly so. From their individual starting points, students make good and sometimes outstanding progress in developing their self-confidence and self-esteem as they build positive relationships with adults and other students.
- The school works closely with the residences to promote students' regular attendance and punctuality. The leadership's focus on these aspects during the past eighteen months has resulted in a significant improvement; where attendance is lower, this is associated with medical conditions. Therapists also work closely with staff to help students develop better self-awareness and control.
- Students have positive attitudes to work and value the rewards system for sustained effort. They respond well to requests and instructions from staff, who provide much encouragement and apply positive behaviour management techniques consistently. Students show respect for their environment, often helping to put equipment away at the end of a lesson. When working as a team, as when taking and fulfilling orders for hot chocolate drinks, they take their turn in making their contribution. When, on occasions, students become excited or something worries them, most respond quickly to the reassurance provided by staff and there is little disruption to learning.

- The school records incidents of misbehaviour fully and regularly analyses these reports to identify trends and triggers. Staff deal promptly with any situations where a student's behaviour is likely to upset or worry others, calming the situation down before it escalates. The need for physical restraint has been drastically reduced since the introduction of the current behaviour and anti-bullying policies in autumn 2012, and such incidents are now rare. The school has not had recourse to fixed-period and permanent exclusions since the previous inspection. Parents, carers and staff agree that students make good progress in taking responsibility for their behaviour. In their responses, students indicate that they are not troubled by the behaviour of others.
- Students are keen to learn and nearly always try hard in lessons. They sustain their concentration well and demonstrate particular enjoyment of music, movement and computer-based graphics. Behaviour is not outstanding because there are occasions when students' engagement in learning dips when there are gaps between activities in lessons.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Thorough checks are made on all adults having contact with students and these are recorded in line with requirements. Visitors are checked and monitored while on the site. Students are well supervised at all times within school and when involved in off-site activities. The school draws up detailed risk assessments for all activities and these are rigorously implemented. Students are given guidance about the use of the internet and the avoidance of cyber bullying.
- The school has a comprehensive personal, social, health and citizenship programme that effectively supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's work to prepare students as much as possible for the next stage of their lives is well focused; where possible, this includes work experience with local businesses. The school's leaders are vigilant in ensuring that at all times students are presented with balanced viewpoints and that their vulnerability does not leave them open to discrimination.
- Staff give high priority to helping students identify and respond to a range of different situations so that they may keep themselves safe. A strength of this approach is that students have regular opportunities to engage in everyday activities under the watchful eye of staff. Regular visits within the local area and wider afield help to consolidate the school's effective work as part of the curriculum and daily school life to prepare students for a life in a community of diverse beliefs and cultures.
- The school has a zero-tolerance policy on discriminatory behaviour and actively helps students to deal with any situations they may face when in the community. Staff, parents and carers are confident in the school's management of students' safety; senior staff and the proprietor assiduously monitor and analyse all incidents and take appropriate action.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The school's records of the checks made on teaching and learning demonstrate that, over time, the quality of teaching is improving and is now good. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and the proportion of teaching demonstrating outstanding features is increasing. The school's portfolio of work from last year demonstrates how improvements in teaching have accelerated students' progress.
- The impact of the peer mentoring provided to help staff improve their practice is clearly evident in successive monitoring observations. This process is having a positive impact on raising staff expectations of what students can achieve, and this is reflected in the analysis of assessment information. As a result, the most-able students are being increasingly well challenged and others are being stretched to achieve their potential. Students rise to the challenge this presents them and are keen to succeed.
- Staff communicate well with students; they model language effectively and place a good emphasis on helping students to develop their expressive language. Many students are quick to respond, using signs and symbols effectively, and share their ideas and opinions.
- Staff make good use of multi-media technology to inspire and develop students' learning. Judicious use of extracts from a 'River Dance' performance successfully helped one student to develop a steady movement while another student independently loaded a film clip on a desktop computer, adjusting the volume and closing the application when it finished playing.

- Support staff make a valuable contribution to lessons. They invariably work with an individual student over a period of time, thus establishing a strong working relationship. Teaching staff and support staff work well together in planning and presenting lessons, and there is a strong professional relationship evident that promotes a secure and purposeful atmosphere for learning.
- Staff manage students' behaviour well, using rewards and de-escalation techniques expertly to maintain their positive attitudes and application to work. In the best practice, staff ensure that different learning activities are seamlessly linked so that the momentum of students' learning is maintained; when this is not as effective, such as when learning resources have to be located and made ready for use, students' concentration dips and has to be restored before learning can continue.
- Class sizes are very small and teachers plan for each student's specific needs. Staff pay close regard to each student's personal learning plan, and to their interests and preferred ways of learning. This successfully engages students' learning at the start of each lesson. Information about students' previous learning is mostly used well to plan the next steps in learning but on occasions the targets do not focus precisely enough on learning and progress.
- Staff use questioning well to help students make choices. In the best practice, questions are preceded with a well-focused summary of the key points in learning that have been covered thus far in the lesson. Sometimes staff do not give students the opportunity to suggest an answer themselves rather than choose from the alternatives given. On occasions, staff provide too much information for students to process effectively. This is particularly the case when staff are giving students feedback on their work and highlighting the next steps in learning; as a result, students are not clear about what they have to do and this slows their learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From their individual starting points when they join the school, students make good and sometimes outstanding progress. This is confirmed by nationally available data. Improvements in the quality of teaching over the past eighteen months have secured demonstrable increases in the achievement of students. While nearly all students' progress is measured in very small steps, parents and carers commented on the significant difference the school has made to their children's capacity to communicate, engage in meaningful activity, and their increased enjoyment of learning and life.
- Students make good progress in developing their communication, literacy and numeracy skills. Individual students communicate in a number of different ways, including using signs and symbols. Staff make clear their expectations that every question requires a response and students are usually prompt in giving this. For some, this represents a significant improvement as they previously would not engage at all. Support from therapists makes an important contribution to students' progress.
- Students' listening skills improve as staff ask specific question, helping them to develop their expressive as well as instructional language. Students make good progress in recognising and repeating patterns as they complete puzzles and jig saws. The most-able students recognise coins of different denominations and independently handle money when selling cups of hot chocolate to staff. On visits to shops and other retail outlets, students make good progress in making purchases and spending their pocket money.
- The school has recently adapted its curriculum for older students to include externally moderated entry level skills courses. While most students are working at entry level 1, some are mastering the skills required for the higher entry level 2. These courses provide well-tailored opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills in real-life situations, including shopping, communicating with others, and making visits to places of interest. This accreditation also recognises students' development of the skills they have acquired through the school's programme for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and which they can apply in a workplace or community setting.
- The most-able pupils are being increasingly challenged by the school's provision. In a food technology lesson, the teacher very ably guided students through measuring out and mixing the ingredients for a cherry pie. With well-chosen words of encouragement and clear guidance about the next steps, the students rose to the challenge and accelerated their own learning as they completed the recipe. They

successfully applied skills including communicating, reading labels and writing on the recipe sheet. They effectively controlled their physical movements as they carefully handled and mixed the ingredients. One of the students, who had initially been reticent about participating, was by the end of lesson thoroughly involved and impatient to sample the finished product.

- Students who, prior to joining the school, have had gaps in their education or been poor attenders are systematically supported in their return to full-time education. Many of these students make rapid progress once they are settled as the result of a well-chosen curriculum and focused teaching. Analysis of assessment data shows that this rate of progress eases as students start to succeed and fill the gaps in their learning. Students are then set challenging targets and leaders regularly monitor their progress towards these; where assessments indicate that such targets may not be achieved, early intervention and support is provided to ensure that the momentum in learning is maintained.
- Students make good and often outstanding progress in their personal development. This is effectively tracked alongside their academic and vocational achievement. Regular visits out of school provide students with valuable opportunities to reach beyond their school community and apply their skills in real life situations. In this way, students are making good progress in developing their understanding of life in modern day Britain, and their appreciation of public institutions and services in England.
- Data confirms that students who are looked after by their local authority make similar progress to other students. Students for whom placing local authorities pass on the pupil premium funding to the school also make similar progress to other students as the gaps in their learning are addressed.

The sixth form provision is good

- Many post-16 students join the school in the sixth form. Their programmes of study follow a similar pattern to those students of compulsory school age, with a strong emphasis on communication skills and personal and social development.
- The quality of teaching for sixth form students is good and this promotes their good achievement. Staff have increasingly high expectations and are challenging students to achieve their potential. Students are keen to succeed and enjoy the good range of practical activities that enable them to apply their skills in different situations. The development of work experience placements provides students with a good transition to the next stage in their lives.
- In this small school, the leadership of the sixth form is an integral part of the whole-school organisation. Leaders are very well focused on ensuring that the older students gain as much as they can from their time in the school. Parents and carers are delighted that the school's provision enables their children to continue in full-time education and achieve well.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | Grade | Judgement |
|--------|---------|----------------------|
| | Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| | Grade 2 | Good |
| | Grade 3 | Requires improvement |
| | Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117042 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC035625 |
| Inspection number | 446280 |
| DfE registration number | 844/6006 |

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Independent special school for students with severe learning difficulties |
| School status | Independent special day school |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 13 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 7 |
| Number of part time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | SENAD Group |
| Chair | Brian Jones (Chief Executive Officer) |
| Headteacher | Martin Carter |
| Date of previous school inspection | 22 November 2011 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £79,000 to £320,000 (combined fee) |
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