

Rowden House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon
Social care inspector	Mark Ryder
Additional Social Care Inspector	Sarah Urding

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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, 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.^{1, 2}

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

Rowden House School is an independent special school. It opened in 1986 to provide for 48 students aged 11 to 19 years who have moderate to severe learning difficulties. It aims to improve students' communication, independence and life skills. Currently, there are 24 students on roll, made up of 17 boys and 7 girls, twelve of whom are post-16 students. Few are below the age of 14 years. All of the students on roll have a statement of special educational needs and, in addition to their other learning difficulties, most have an autism spectrum disorder. Rowden House is also a registered children's home for 44 young people. It was inspected at the same time as the school. Currently, the 24 students are accommodated in the children's home, 16 of whom are looked after by their local authorities.

The school was last inspected in June 2008 and the children's home was last inspected in February 2011.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is satisfactory. Numbers on roll have fallen since the last inspection which has affected staffing and the capacity of leadership, in particular, to drive improvement. Students' progress is satisfactory as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their welfare, health and safety are satisfactory as are the arrangements for safeguarding. The school meets almost all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory although it lacks the strong monitoring and oversight to give its implementation and further improvement real impetus. It offers full time education and is enriched with a range of activities providing students a variety of learning opportunities promoting their progress. Communication, literacy and

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

numeracy form the core of learning opportunities and these permeate activities throughout the day and into the evening. Symbols and signing are features of interactions between adults and students. However, they are used better by some staff than others and not consistently enough in the children's home. Here, some staff are not alert to seeking opportunities to engage students in activity and communicate with them.

Work and activities take place in range of contexts, the local community in particular, where students become accustomed to new situations such as the supermarket and leisure centre. Teachers link their planning to the objectives agreed for each student at the annual review of their statement, which ensures its requirements are met. The curriculum for students of compulsory school age includes all the required areas of learning. Students are offered opportunities to learn the essential skills of using money, budgeting and shopping. The balance of work and activities are suited to Key Stage 4 and post-16 students who are the large majority. The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network's Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses provide accreditation and further options for practical, relevant challenges building on these students' preparation for greater independence in the future. Moreover, working on a farm project has provided students with the experience of caring for animals and doing groundwork. In school, a group of students manage a café enterprise in which they sell the biscuits and cakes made in cookery. The school sets high expectations in regard to personal, social and health education. Provision which supports students becoming more independent runs through all of the work in the school day and in the children's home. All staff are focused on promoting students' independence, improving satisfactorily their behaviour, relationships, awareness of staying safe and being healthy.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory and all but two regulations are met. While lessons are planned and taught in ways that meet students' needs the opportunities for teachers to develop knowledge and expertise are limited. A few lessons are expertly taught, using effectively a wide variety of sensory activities and resources. This keeps students engaged, behaving well, learning and making progress. Too often teaching does not achieve these good qualities although most are planned with clear learning intentions drawing upon students' objectives agreed in annual reviews of the statement of special educational needs. However, approaches to teaching sometimes fail to engage the whole class and unengaged students' behaviour distracts or disrupts the lesson. There is a plentiful supply of adult assistance in classrooms made up of teaching assistants supplemented by staff from the children's home. Teams are not always briefed sufficiently on their roles for engaging students in learning and helping them to behave well.

Teachers implement the school's assessment procedures satisfactorily. However, assessment lacks the degree of rigour needed to measure the small steps of progress students are likely to make and give sharp focus to increasing students' rate of progress. Teachers record students' attainment and support this with photographs or a sample of work. This evidence lacks clarity in demonstrating improvement from one level to the next and showing the progress in students' performance. The opportunities for teachers to hone their assessment skills are limited to moderation

exercises in school and no scope to link with similar schools to test their judgement and share good practice.

Progress is satisfactory. Students' complete a wide range of tasks set by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network's Transition Challenge and Towards Independence courses. The number of tasks being successfully completed with increasing independence has risen year-on-year. Tasks contribute to students' improving basic skills in communication, literacy and numeracy. They make progress in their independence such as in following instructions, taking turns and managing responsibilities. Students become accustomed to the demands of the world outside school through visits into the local community, visiting supermarkets and shopping for food they later help to cook.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. Students indicate that they enjoy school and they take enjoyment from their good relationships with staff. Most parents support this view. The very large majority of students are comfortable in their relationships with each other. While a few find group situations too challenging, with constant support they improve their capacity to accept others and work alongside them. Behaviour is satisfactory and no better because the highly sophisticated behaviour management strategies needed for the very challenging behaviour many students present are not embedded.

A variety of opportunities in school and in the community enable students to contribute and this helps them appreciate their usefulness to others. They set out and gather up chairs at assembly time and each year take part in collecting money for good causes. The knowledge and skills learnt in school and the wide range of experiences gained in the community ensures they are prepared for the future. The curriculum provides opportunities for cultural experience taking account of students' different heritages and the diversity of faiths and cultures in Britain. Some students have visited a Sikh temple and a mosque.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Students' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. The clearly defined practices and procedures followed by staff ensure students stay safe. Students are closely supervised. School grounds are kept secure although at night time poor lighting around the area of the children's home makes it less safe for students. The arrangements for child protection are well organised and embedded. Links with the local authority in which the school is located and with other providers, are used for training leaders and staff in safeguarding. Specialised safeguarding training relating to mental health, deprivation and liberty have been undertaken ensuring there is a sharper focus in relation to the needs of students. A healthy lifestyle for students is promoted by careful consideration of diet and provision of special dietary requirements relating both to medical and religious requirements. Physical development programmes are planned in detail in conjunction with the school's physiotherapist and occupational therapist to treat disabilities and promote

movement. However, arrangements to evaluate the impact of programmes are not well established. Similarly, while staff care for students and perform their duties almost always, the development and refining of practice to promote students' well-being is not strong.

The school fully meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the checks to confirm the suitability of proprietors, staff, agency staff and others are carried out and recorded with rigour and meet requirements.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school has extensive grounds which are used well by students for exercises to stay fit, improve movement and become accustomed to open spaces and new environments. It has facilities for students to grow plants and vegetables. The grounds and premises are kept in a safe, well-maintained state. Classrooms are adequate to enable learning and sufficient for the number and age range of students. Most are located in a modern extension which has specialist rooms for information and communication technology, food technology and art. The ground floor and first floor of the main house contains classrooms used by post-16 students which are adequate but would benefit from upgrading to reflect better a post-16 ethos.

Provision of information

The school publishes an attractive and fully informative prospectus for parents, carers and placing authorities. This is complemented well by a website providing a wide range of information including all of the school policies that are to be made available to parents, carers and others. Detailed reports are written for the annual review of students' statements of special educational needs and for the reviews of students who are looked after by their local authority.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy meets requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standards in part 1) and must:

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made.

- use effective strategies for managing behaviour and encourage students to act responsibly (paragraph 3(h))
- assess students' work thoroughly and use the information on their performance to evaluate their progress by reference to the school's own objectives and by national norms (paragraph 4).

National minimum standards

The care provision was judged to be satisfactory and national minimum standards were met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development.

- Put in place arrangements for the regular review and development of all aspects of practice in order to secure improvement and consistency in the implementation of agreed policies.

Inspection judgements

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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for students with severe learning difficulties		
Date school opened	3 March 1986		
Age range of students	10-19 years		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 17	Girls: 7	Total: 24
Number of boarders	Boys: 17	Girls: 7	Total: 24
Number of students with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 17	Girls: 7	Total: 24
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Annual fees (boarders)	£157,00 - £211,000		
Email address	iangateley@rowdenhouse.com		
Headteacher	Ian Gateley		
Proprietor	The Senad Group		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Rowden House School

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education and these are some of the things we liked most:

- The work and activities planned for you are varied, interesting and give you many opportunities to learn and prepare for the future.
- You are learning to communicate using signs and symbols, although staff can do more to help you practise and learn more.
- Some of your lessons are lively and enjoyable for you and you make good progress in these.
- Your progress is satisfactory. For it to be good, I have asked teachers to find better ways to manage behaviour and for you to learn.
- You have good relationships with staff and they keep you safe and healthy.

I have asked the headteacher to:

- help staff develop their skills to support you in improving your behaviour
- ensure teachers assess your work thoroughly so they can keep a close track on your progress.

You can help by trying hard to behave well and making good efforts in lessons to learn. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon
Lead inspector