

Rowden House School

Rowden House, Winslow, Bromyard HR7 4LS

Inspection dates

28–30 November 2017

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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment has continued to improve since the last inspection. The school complies fully with the independent school standards.
- The SENAD group have offered effective support to leaders. As a result, pupils benefit from a rich curriculum and make strong progress.
- Senior leaders within the SENAD group use creative and intelligent strategies to ensure that leaders of different settings share their strengths and learn from one another.
- The cornerstone of improvements to teaching is the school's commitment to improving practice through in-class support and coaching.
- Leaders are skilled and enthusiastic. They have sharply pinpointed the areas that the school must develop next to secure outstanding practice.
- Outcomes are strong across the school. Staff effectively track pupils' achievement through individual learning plans.
- Staff are using additional assessment systems to take even greater account of the development of the whole child. However, new systems are not yet fully utilised or embedded.
- There is some minor variation in the quality of teachers' planning. In the best planning, teachers maintain a consistently sharp focus on how pupils will develop specific skills. This effective work is not shared widely enough.
- Some staff require greater training and support to ensure that they offer a consistently high level of challenge and support in lessons.
- Students benefit from valuable work experience placements in the sixth form. This aspect of the school's work is a key strength and is rightly recognised as a model of good practice for other schools within the SENAD group. However, self-evaluation of the sixth form is not as rigorous as other aspects of the school.
- Staff and pupils enjoy very positive relationships.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby outcomes, by making sure that:
 - teachers' planning consistently focuses on the key skills that pupils will develop and offers even more opportunities for challenge
 - teachers have more opportunities to share what they know works well in their classrooms
 - new developments to the assessment system are fully embedded so that information about pupils' engagement is used to accelerate pupils' progress even more.
- Further improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - support staff receive training to ensure that they offer a consistently high level of challenge when they are supporting learning in lessons.
 - the self-evaluation of the sixth form is even more thorough.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers are highly effective. They have supported the school to develop and improve provision for pupils. Leaders have a very clear view of the school's overall effectiveness. They are rightly proud of their workforce and the outcomes that they secure for pupils.
- The independent school standards are fully met. Leaders and the wider SENAD group have ensured that policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and meet requirements.
- Leaders have continued to ensure that areas for improvement identified at the last inspection improve. The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment has developed considerably. Teachers benefit from opportunities to work with one another and participate in coaching programmes with a senior teacher.
- Oversight from the SENAD group is rigorous and developmental. Officers visit the school regularly and conduct focused monitoring activities with leaders. These activities pinpoint strengths and any areas for improvement. Leaders respond positively to this support and welcome the opportunity to review the impact of their actions.
- Performance management is effective. Teachers meet with leaders throughout the year to review the impact of their work. During meetings, teachers and leaders explore pupils' progress and devise actions to respond to any trends.
- Robust performance management also extends to the leadership team. Leaders are given opportunities to share their work with peers across the SENAD group. This commitment to sharing best practice and learning from one another is impressive. Leaders and managers demonstrate a strong desire to learn and improve constantly.
- The curriculum has been designed to support the academic and personal development of pupils. The promotion and development of pupils' communication skills is at the heart of all plans. Staff have devised termly plans with a topic approach. Teachers use these long-term plans to devise activities that support the development of pupils' knowledge and skills day to day. Every pupil has an individual learning plan that clearly sets out how and when skills will be taught.
- Leaders effectively make use of any additional funding. In addition to the rich curriculum, pupils enjoy opportunities to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. For example, several pupils attend regular yoga sessions, and all pupils participate in art and music sessions with specialist teachers.
- Staff are proud to work at the school. Staff that responded to Ofsted's questionnaire unanimously feel that they are treated fairly and equally. Staff state that learners are safe and that the school is well led and managed. One member of staff commented, 'My training needs are extremely well met and progression within the school is encouraged', and another stated, 'I would say this is one of the most fulfilling positions I have had in my career.' These views were typical of those shared by the whole workforce.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted. Given pupils' very complex needs, staff plan learning that allows pupils to make sense of the world around them. For younger pupils, this involves taking turns, developing teamwork skills

and making decisions about what they do and don't want to do. For older pupils, particularly those in the sixth form, there are opportunities to develop as citizens, contributing to the community and raising money for charity. Fundamental British values are explored in a similar way. Over time, pupils learn mutual respect for one another, devise rules for their classrooms, and have their say in what they do and when.

- Children looked after by the local authority are well supported. Leaders ensure that personal education plans are regularly reviewed and that pupils' individual needs are met. Meetings are held to review the progress of children looked after. Staff gather key information about pupils' development and agree any necessary actions to secure further development.
- Parents that the lead inspector spoke to are highly satisfied with the support and care their children receive. One parent shared how amazed they were at the experiences offered to their child. Given the complexity of their child's needs, the parent stated that they would never have thought some of the learning opportunities would have ever been possible.
- There is some variation in the impact of support staff across the school. Leaders recognise that there is more work to be done in ensuring that support staff offer a consistently high standard of support and challenge to pupils.
- Though the overall standard of teaching and learning has improved, there is scope for the most effective practice to be shared even more widely. The best practice is not yet consistent or embedded across the school.

Governance

- The school does not have a formal governing body. The impact of leaders' work is overseen by the senior officers and quality assurance managers. Officers and managers know the school well and have supported leaders effectively to improve the school. Officers and managers:
 - visit school regularly to evaluate the impact that teaching is having on learning
 - devise appropriate and relevant areas for improvement for leaders to focus on
 - encourage leaders to share key strengths with the wider SENAD group
 - have devised effective training and development opportunities for leaders
 - have high expectations of staff and have struck an effective balance between offering both support and challenge.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have created a culture of safeguarding at Rowden House. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and understand pupils' needs well.
- The safeguarding policy reflects the most recent guidance. Leaders and staff know how to respond to concerns and are clear about the signs and potential indicators of different forms of abuse. The safeguarding policy is available on the school's website.
- The curriculum supports pupils to stay and feel safe. Staff have devised creative and

meaningful ways to introduce and reinforce ways to stay safe. For example, pupils in key stage 3 have explored the key messages from the 'PANTS campaign'. This child protection programme from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children helps pupils to learn how to stay safe and understand that their body belongs to them.

- Pupils have also been supported to design large works of art that depict the faces of key staff who lead safeguarding. This strategy helps pupils know whom they can talk to if anything is worrying them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers develop very strong relationships with pupils. Teachers understand pupils' needs and plan sequences of learning that support academic and personal development.
- Teachers have a wide range of strategies in place to ensure that pupils' communication skills are developed. Through a combination of sign language, visual timetables and other communication systems, pupils effectively manage the school day and make broadly strong rates of progress.
- In the best lessons, teachers' planning consistently identifies the key skills that pupils will develop. Moreover, staff use instruction and questions skilfully to stimulate engagement and secure rapid progress. The most effective plans ensure that pupils are increasingly challenged and have frequent opportunities to demonstrate independence. Leaders acknowledge that there is scope for the best teaching practice to be shared more widely so that the overall impact on learning is raised securely to the next level.
- Teachers pay close attention to the aims and objectives set out in education, health and care plans. Teachers devise individual learning plans for each pupil and regularly review pupils' progress with their teams.
- Assessment information has developed considerably. Pupils' achievement is carefully monitored throughout the year. Tracking systems are clear and concise and allow leaders to respond promptly to any variation in achievement. Though these systems do assess pupils' personal development, additional work has been undertaken in the last year to fully take account of pupils' engagement. This work has been well received by teachers and is resulting in some important findings. However, further work is required to ensure that this effective practice is fully embedded.
- Teachers' judgements are rigorously moderated. Rowden House works with a local partner school to check on the validity of the assessment information they gather about pupils. Teachers and officers also debate and challenge one another about pupils' progress. As a result, assessment information is reliable.
- Teachers produce annual reports that paint a picture of pupils' progress and development throughout the year. Teachers devise 'next steps' for pupils so that everyone is clear about what is required in the next stage of learning. Pupils also contribute to annual reports. They write about their likes and dislikes and the areas of learning they want to get even better at.
- Support staff are key to pupils' development. The vast majority of support staff work proactively and have an exceptional understanding of pupils' needs. Many support staff take on additional responsibilities to enrich pupils' experiences and lives further. A strong example of this work is the leadership of work experience for students in the sixth form.

However, some support staff require further training and support to ensure that they have a consistently high impact on outcomes. In some classes, there is variability in the overall quality of support that pupils receive. As a result, on occasion, the level of challenge for pupils can lapse.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop their self-confidence well during their time at Rowden. They are supported by committed staff. Over time, staff help pupils develop the confidence to act independently and make decisions.
- Pupils' emotional needs are a priority. Staff take great care to recognise any changes to pupils' behaviour. Many staff are highly skilled and intuitively adapt and adjust the environment to ensure that pupils are reassured and can be engaged in learning.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a wide range of ways. Pupils learn about 'safe spaces' and can access numerous comfortable and calm places around the school site. Practice is particularly strong in the sixth form. As a result of strong support over several years, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their lives.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school.
- Staff support pupils to make positive choices. The school's behaviour policy is based upon positive reinforcement and de-escalation. Staff effectively pre-empt pupils' behaviour and any anxieties they may have. The vast majority of staff react quickly and positively to any negative pupil behaviour. Staff refocus pupils quickly and ensure that engagement is maintained so that learning can continue.
- Leaders track any incidents of poor behaviour exceptionally well. Incidents of physical intervention have reduced significantly over time and are now rare. Trends in behaviour are tracked on an individual basis and strategies are quickly devised to establish any necessary additional support.
- Pupils' attendance is strong. Attendance has improved again this term. Any low attendance is as a result of pupils' specific personal and medical needs.
- Some staff do not routinely intervene to support pupils at the optimum point. On occasion, this can result in a lower level of challenge for pupils because their engagement is not maintained.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Assessment information and evidence of pupils' recorded learning demonstrate that pupils make strong progress over time.
- There are no significant gaps between any groups or key stages.

- Pupils have opportunities to gain a wide range of accreditation. In the last year, several students have gained accreditation in the following areas: developing skills for the workplace, engaging in the world around us, going places (exploring and understanding the local community) and real-life mathematics learning.
- Strong outcomes are also evidenced through the regular review of pupils' individual learning plans and care plans. Pupils' journals and annual reviews show how proud pupils are in developing personal independence and the skills to cooperate and work within a group.
- Leaders have a sharp focus on assessing pupils' needs when they first arrive at Rowden. This information is used to establish targets in a range of curriculum areas, including personal, social, health and economic education. Over time, progress is strong. Any variation in achievement is picked up quickly and addressed through regular reviews with staff.
- Above all, pupils are able to make gains in their learning because times of transition are managed well by staff. In the vast majority of lessons and experiences, staff waste no time reinforcing key skills and ensuring that pupils maintain their interest. However, on occasion, this momentum can lapse and progress is not as rapid.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Work experience is a key strength of the sixth form. The school's effective work has been disseminated to other schools within the SENAD group. Leaders are rightly proud of the opportunities they provide for their students.
- Work experience is predominantly based in and around the local community. Staff have forged strong links with local farms and businesses to provide students with the opportunity to develop life skills. For example, over recent years several students have gained experience working at a local farm. These experiences are appropriately risk assessed and very well organised. Farmers collaborate with staff to plan a programme of work for students. Recently, students have helped manage produce in polytunnels and feed livestock. Students make a valuable contribution to the work of the farm and take pride in what they do.
- Programmes of study focus on developing students' English and mathematical skills. Staff consistently reinforce number and literacy skills through well-planned activities. As a result, students are able to gain confidence in navigating the school day and understanding how long different events will last for. Students also effectively develop their reading and writing skills.
- As in the rest of the school, teaching has a positive impact on learning. Staff are highly skilled and manage students' behaviour well. Some staff are very talented; they know students well and draw upon a wide range of effective strategies to maintain engagement and focus.
- Students are supported to explore how they react to different situations. The school's therapy team assist staff in helping students communicate their thoughts. As a result, students are able to identify places that they can go to feel calm and exercise control over their actions.
- The sixth form prepares students well for the next stage of their lives. There is a sharp

focus on developing decision-making and life skills. This helps students feel ready for transition to adulthood.

- The sixth form is effectively led by the school's senior leaders. Leaders acknowledge that their self-evaluation of this aspect of the school could have even more rigour and be enhanced further by developing the leadership skills of key staff.

School details

Unique reference number	117042
DfE registration number	884/6006
Inspection number	10038828

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The SENAD Group
Chair	Mr Brian Jones
Headteacher	Martin Carter
Annual fees (day pupils)	£96,438
Telephone number	01885 488096
Website	senadgroup.com/rowden
Email address	info@senadgroup.com
Date of previous inspection	7–9 October 2014

Information about this school

- Rowden House School is an independent special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. The school is registered to admit up to 48 students. Students can arrive at different points in the school year.
- The school is managed and owned by the SENAD group. The school shares a campus with children's and adults' homes. These homes are inspected separately.

- There are currently 14 pupils on roll, aged 11 to 19 years. The majority of pupils are children looked after. Thirteen students live on the school campus.
- Two local authorities supply pupil premium funding in addition to other fees.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. Pupils have complex mental health needs and/or medical conditions. Many pupils have challenging behaviour.
- Some pupils have spent long periods away from education prior to transition to Rowden House.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.
- The school was last inspected in October 2014.

Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to consider, as part of this standard inspection: the arrangements made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, and whether such arrangements have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State; the welfare, health and safety of pupils; and the quality of leadership and management.
- The inspector observed learning in every classroom. Observations were undertaken jointly with leaders. Some classes were visited more than once. During observations, the inspector spoke to students and reviewed their learning.
- A range of documents were scrutinised, including: self-evaluation and development plans, assessment information, individual learning plans, attendance information, child protection files, safeguarding files, the school's complaints log, annual reviews, pupils' learning, monitoring records, performance management information, first-aid documents and policies and procedures.
- The inspector undertook a tour of the site to inspect the standard of premises and accommodation.
- The inspector met with the SENAD group's chief operating officer and quality assurance manager.
- The inspector considered 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- The inspector spoke to two families and a representative from one placing local authority via the telephone. There were insufficient responses to Parent View to generate a report.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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