

# Rivermead School

Forge Lane, Gillingham, ME7 1UG

**Inspection dates** 18–19 September 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of students		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of students		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and students

### This is a good school.

- Leaders and governors have ensured that there has been good progress since the last inspection.
- Progress in mathematics has risen rapidly over the last three years, so that by the end of Key Stage 4, some students achieve good GCSE grades. Overall progress in English has also improved.
- Teaching is consistently good. Systems to check students' progress are robust, and carefully targeted support is provided for students who are at risk of falling behind other students.
- Professionals such as the speech and language therapist, who works with students with autism and other complex needs, make a strong contribution to these students' communication and social skills.
- Additional funding has been used effectively to ensure that gaps are narrowing rapidly for eligible students in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is good. The school has an effective partnership with Mid-Kent College so students make good progress. They are prepared well for their next steps in education, training and work.
- Behaviour in the school, as well as in the sixth form, is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants create a calm, purposeful environment which promotes students' positive attitudes to learning so students get on well with each other and make good progress.
- Students say the school is a safe and caring place. Parents, carers and staff hold similar views.
- The school supports neighbouring schools through the '6+6' Outreach Centre which supports students at risk of exclusion.
- Students enjoy the wide variety of themes and subjects that provide plenty of opportunities to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Consequently, their attendance is high.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide effective support to ensure the school continues to improve.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' writing skills are not improving as rapidly as their mathematical and reading skills.
- A few important safety policies have not been updated.
- A few more able students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form do not have a chance to choose from a broad range of academic subjects.

### Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in nine lessons, all of which were jointly observed with the headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team. The inspectors also listened to students read.
- Meetings were held with staff, students, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 13 responses to the online Parent View survey and 36 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school’s practice and looked at a range of documentation, including its checks on how well it is doing, improvement planning and information on students’ progress. Inspectors also scrutinised documents used by senior leaders to check the school’s work on attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.

### Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Carol Vant

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Rivermead School is a community special school for students aged 11 to 19 years old diagnosed with autism. Most students have underlying speech, language and communication difficulties and some have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. A few students are physically disabled. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- About a quarter of students are girls; the rest are boys.
- Almost all students are from White British backgrounds.
- About a third of students are supported through the pupil premium. This is above average. This additional government funding is for students who are looked after and for students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school receives a small amount of additional funding for its students in Year 7.
- There have been some changes in the school since the last inspection. A new headteacher started in September 2014 and had been in post for about two weeks during this inspection. A new assistant headteacher joined the senior leadership team in April 2014.
- The school works closely with several external services and is linked to the community speech and language therapist service. The school has also employed a qualified speech and language therapist.
- The sixth form is run through a partnership between the school and Mid-Kent College.
- Students are not entered early for examinations.
- The school provides training and support for other local schools through its 6 + 6 Outreach Centre.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress in writing by ensuring that:
  - teachers develop student's writing skills as soon as they join the school in Year 7
  - teachers' marking of writing always leads to improvement, particularly in grammar and punctuation.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - all school policies, especially the child protection and e-safety policies, are updated when they are due
  - the few more able students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have more academic qualifications to choose from.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has justifiably earned the trust and respect of the school community by providing strong leadership that has empowered staff as well as students to do as well as they can. In the words of a member of staff, 'I am proud to be a member of a caring dedicated staff team who are determined to do their best for all students.'
- All leaders, including governors, and staff are unanimous in their drive for improvement. They share an ambition to increase progress by continually improving the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers do this by planning lessons and looking closely at students' work together.
- Along with governors, the school is focused on raising standards in behaviour and achievement, demonstrating clear capacity for improvement.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has led to significant improvement in mathematics and English since the previous inspection.
- Students and parents benefit from accurate assessment information which indicates clearly how well students are doing and where they need to improve.
- The proportion of more able students in Key Stage 4 achieving good GCSEs in English and mathematics has steadily increased since the previous inspection. Senior leaders have ensured that a wide range of subjects are offered, particularly at Key Stage 3, to match the ability of more-able students. School records show that Key Stage 3 students progress well in all these subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. However, in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, senior leaders have not made sure that the few more able students have a wide range of academic qualifications to choose from.
- Underpinning the positive picture of good pupil achievement is the strength of the systems for checking students' progress. These are effectively aligned to the management of staff performance and shared with governors. Staff are clear about their targets to improve students' progress and value the effective professional development they receive. They know their success is clearly linked to both their future careers and salary progression.
- The school has used the 6 + 6 Outreach Centre to encourage collaboration and sharing of outstanding behaviour strategies between local schools. About three quarters of students at risk of exclusion or excluded from other schools have been successfully placed back into education.
- Increasingly, middle leaders are effective in their areas of responsibility. They use information about students' progress and students' work to model exemplary learning. While leaders have been successful in improving aspects of the quality of teaching since the previous inspection, some minor inconsistencies remain. For example, a minority of students are still not making rapid enough progress in their writing.
- Subjects offered by the school provide a wide range of opportunities for high-quality learning and meet the needs and interests of most students. Students obtain entry-level, functional skills as well as GCSEs in a range of subjects. There is a clear focus on teaching communication and social skills across the school, led by speech and language therapists. It is very successfully broadened by a wide variety of enrichment activities, including sports and visits. Plans are developing to implement the new national curriculum in full.
- The development of students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is highly successful and embedded in the curriculum and the everyday life of the school. Students celebrate the diversity of their individual needs and thrive under the different cultural opportunities open to them. Consequently, they demonstrate a positive and confident approach to life which results from having high self-esteem.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and there are good arrangements in place for supporting students who are on the child protection register.
- The local authority has provided 'light-touch' support for this good school, which has benefited from high-quality reviews and training, when requested.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body supports the headteacher well. Governors visit the school regularly to keep up to date with developments. These visits are increasingly linked to checking on the impact of school improvement planning. Governors take part in regular training, either at school or on local authority courses. They are becoming more proficient in understanding and using information about students' progress provided by the school. Consequently, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Governors contribute to the school's evaluation of its work and to its long-term plans, particularly for the quality of teaching. They monitor how the additional funding for students is allocated and are pleased that the gaps have now closed as a result. They are proud that the behaviour of students improves rapidly to outstanding as they progress through the school. This

assures them that students are extremely well prepared for life in modern Britain. They check that teachers are suitably rewarded for good performance and areas of underperformance are identified and improved. Governors ensure that additional funding is allocated correctly and leads to eligible students making good progress in developing their reading, writing and mathematics skills. Governors make sure that the system for managing the performance of staff is linked closely to pay for teachers and senior leaders. The governing body ensures that the school follows the correct procedures and systems to keep students and staff safe.

### **The behaviour and safety of students** are good

- Students' behaviour in the classroom and around the school is outstanding. Students start and end their day in 'SEAL Groups' led by 'SEAL Tutors'. This helps to promote reflection and improves their understanding of 'right and wrong' behaviours. They learn to open doors for others, to take turns and show respect for staff and visitors. Consequently, all students, including some that have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, have excellent attitudes to their learning and are keen to try as hard as they can.
- Students with complex needs such as students with autism and underlying speech, language and communication difficulties have exceptionally well-developed social skills. This is because the school invested well in a speech and language therapist who has worked collaboratively with teachers to support them.
- All the parents who responded to Parent View were very positive about behaviour in the school. Staff, too, feel behaviour in the school is extremely well managed and a strong feature of the school.
- Robust behaviour routines are well embedded and incidents of unacceptable behaviour are very few. When they happen, students say that it is managed extremely well by teachers and support staff. No pupil has been permanently excluded from the school in the last three years and the number of students who are excluded for a few days in a year has reduced drastically.
- Students enjoy taking on responsibilities such as being members of the school council. They take these roles very seriously because the school seizes these opportunities to teach them how to vote and be voted for, preparing them extremely well for life as adults in modern Britain.
- Attendance is above average and improving. The numbers of students with persistent absence is falling dramatically because of the school's persistence in ensuring their presence at school.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel happy and safe at the school. They are aware of what constitutes bullying, including cyber bullying, and know adults will help them to sort out any problems that arise on the rare occasions when bullying occurs. However, some important policies, such as the child protection and e-safety policy, have not been updated with current information on student safety.
- The school has invested in a good range of equipment and activities for the playground to ensure that students are both active and fully occupied during lunch and playtimes. All students, including those with physical disabilities, enjoy access to all sports. They are well supervised at these times.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Teachers and their teaching assistants work together in effective teams. They provide a calm, purposeful atmosphere and develop good relationships with students that help to foster their outstanding attitudes to learning. They routinely assess the effectiveness of their teaching to promote good achievement.
- Consistently strong teaching has brought about accelerated progress in mathematics over the past two years. Better use of pupil progress information means that teachers' expectations of what students can do are higher than previously. Teachers successfully plan learning activities that build on students' understanding from the previous lesson. As a result, most students are appropriately challenged to make rapid gains.
- Students' reading is improving because staff ensure that students read widely and often. Reading is routinely carried out every morning in SEAL groups in a purposeful and calm environment that promotes learning. This gives a chance for girls, though outnumbered by boys, to speak up, grow in confidence and

make good progress.

- Students that struggle with reading in Year 7 are making good progress and gaps in reading with other students of a similar age are closing. The additional funding for Year 7 is used to purchase good resources that support the learning of phonics (the sounds that letters make) in small groups or one to one.
- The teaching of writing is not improving as fast as reading or mathematics. Evidence in students' books shows that the quality of feedback provided by teachers has improved in mathematics, but not in writing.
- Teachers' marking has not led to enough improvement in students' grammar and punctuation. Consequently, there is a big difference in the numbers of students that obtain good GCSEs in mathematics compared to English.

### The achievement of students

is good

- Most students enter the school with attainment which is below that expected for their age. They make good progress and some, particularly the more able, obtain good GCSEs in mathematics and English at the end of Year 11. These improvements in students' attainment result from strengthened teaching and well-targeted support for students who are at risk of falling behind.
- More-able students make good progress throughout the school. Teachers plan work that is closely matched to students' ability and have high expectations of what they are capable of achieving.
- The school actively promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination. It ensures that groups such as boys and girls and those with autism or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties make good progress in English and mathematics from their different starting points.
- The additional funding is used well to provide the best help for students needing support with their learning. Leaders base its use on a close assessment of each pupil's progress and needs. For example, leaders recognise the complex needs of some disadvantaged students diagnosed with autism and have used teaching one to one or in small groups to ensure that eligible students make at least similar progress to others throughout the school. While progress in English and mathematics is improving over time, by the end of Year 11, these students' progress is currently approximately a whole year behind others' in their year group nationally.
- Students' speaking and listening skills are well developed because they are given many opportunities to discuss ideas in groups and with adults. As a result, many students with autism are confident and fluent.
- Students consistently make accelerated progress in mathematics because the subject is exceptionally well led and managed.
- Progress in reading and writing is good, with notable success in the 2014 GCSE in English. However, a minority of students still do not make sufficiently rapid gains with their writing.

### The sixth-form provision

is good

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Sixth-form students attend Mid-Kent College. They benefit well from the effective partnership between the school and Mid-Kent College which ensures a calm and supportive environment for students to learn and develop personal skills.
- Behaviour of students in the sixth form is outstanding. The school helps students through an excellent system of support to manage their behaviour and achieve well. For example, school 'mentors' work closely with students on their personal daily timetables to ensure that students who have autism maintain excellent attitudes to learning and make good progress.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure in the sixth form is good. Students' attendance, although improving, is slightly below average.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good and leads to good progress for most students. Students enjoy the opportunities they are given to learn alongside their mainstream classmates. This helps them to develop excellent social and workplace skills.
- Most students in the sixth form achieve well and make good progress from low starting points. Students are offered a good range of vocational qualifications up to Level 3 and work-experience courses that prepare them well for future training and work. However, more-able students are not progressing quickly enough because they do not have a wide range of academic qualifications that match their ability to choose from.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its students' needs. This ensures that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its students' needs. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

**School details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134150
<b>Local authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	448022
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of students</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of students</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of students in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of students on the school roll</b>	119
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	20
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ian Chappell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tina Lovey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20–21 March 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 338348
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