

Rivers Education Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135890
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	360774
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Annie Brown
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors who visited eleven lessons and observed eleven teachers. The inspectors also held discussions with a member of the management committee, staff and headteachers from local schools, and talked with parents and carers, and pupils. The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including: assessment and attendance information; lesson plans; safeguarding arrangements; school development planning; management committee minutes; and pupils' work. Inspectors scrutinised the 17 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the centre's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness of the new senior leadership team in managing the complex provision that is based on different sites and in schools.
- The extent to which the revised curriculum and individualised programmes are raising levels of achievement and getting pupils more involved in their learning, while preparing them for a future beyond the centre.
- How far the new management committee, while supporting the senior leadership team, is influencing the centre's direction and lifting performance.

Information about the school

Rivers Education Support Centre serves a wide geographical area. It was formed in September 2009 following the amalgamation of two education support centres to serve 97 primary and 21 secondary schools. The centre is subject to further re-organisation. Currently, the provision provides on-site tuition for pupils in Years 7 to 11 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who have been either permanently excluded, or are at serious risk of being excluded and are dual registered with their mainstream schools. All pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A significant proportion of pupils in Years 7 to 9 have a statement of special educational needs and are waiting to be transferred to a special school. Pupils have regular access to a range of other professional support services, including the mental health team. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and a significant proportion have not attended their mainstream schools for a considerable period.

The on-site provision is located on two sites, which cater separately for the needs of pupils in Years 7 to 9 and those in Years 10 and 11. Several staff share their time between the two sites, which are several miles apart. The centre gives in-school support to pupils who are at risk of exclusion. At the time of the inspection, pupils in Years 10 and 11 were participating in a work-experience programme at locations away from the centre.

The centre has achieved National Healthy Schools status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Rivers Education Support Centre is an effective pupil referral unit. It has a number of outstanding features. One of these is the exceptionally good provision of care, support and guidance. Staff provide an extremely supportive and nurturing environment which places a high priority on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and in developing their confidence. One pupil wrote: 'If it wasn't for all of you at the centre I don't know where I would be right now. You all helped me change my life.' Parents and carers are very supportive of the centre's work and welcome the influence it is having on their children's attitudes, behaviour and progress.

In a relatively short period, the centre has developed a common approach and established realistic expectations of where it wants the pupils to be. Very effective systems have been introduced to monitor the progress of pupils and the centre's path to sustained improvement. The centre has achieved its success through the hard work and resolute leadership of the headteacher, who is passionate about establishing the best provision and gaining the highest possible outcomes for all pupils and their families. She is extremely well supported by a very dedicated and skilful team of staff who, collectively, are constantly looking for ways in which they can improve the provision. Consequently, self evaluation is accurate and the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve.

As a result of high expectations and strong relationships with staff, pupils' attitudes and behaviour improve significantly soon after they join. Pupils say that they feel very safe and secure in a highly supportive environment and the trust developed between pupils and staff is at the core of this success. It is an indicator of the centre's success that the very large majority of pupils improve their attendance dramatically, with some undertaking long journeys on public transport to get to the centre. For many, it is the first time they have attended school on a regular basis. Such significant improvements lay down firm foundations for the pupils' effective reintegration to mainstream education, enrolment at college or successful employment. However, while in the short term the centre successfully meets the educational needs of pupils waiting to be placed in a special school, it does not have the specialist staff or facilities to cater for their behavioural and emotional needs for an extended period.

As a result of good teaching, pupils develop their skills effectively and make up for substantial deficits in their education. Teaching is effective because staff know each pupil, including their needs and backgrounds, extremely well and use this information to help with planning. The flexible curriculum provides personally-tailored courses of study to cater for the needs of all pupils. These courses enable pupils to raise their levels of achievement and experience success. Consequently, pupils make good progress in academic and vocational studies at a variety of levels. Data show attainment levels that are broadly average for the majority of pupils in some GCSE subjects as well as in a range

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of other nationally-recognised qualifications. However, the range of course does not provide pupils in Years 10 and 11 with a sufficient range of learning experiences and qualifications that prepares them for entry into more advanced courses in construction and/or car mechanics, for example.

The support given to pupils in local and primary and secondary schools is outstanding. Schools are extremely positive about the support they receive which has led to a substantial reduction in the number of permanent exclusions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders and the management committee should ensure that those pupils designated for special schools are transferred as soon as possible.
 - Increase the range of learning opportunities that lead to nationally recognised qualifications, especially those in vocational education, for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils make good progress from low starting points, as a result of the centre's determined efforts and exceptionally well-informed support. Achievement is good. Pupils demonstrate high levels of emotional and/or social needs, which have often resulted in lengthy periods of absence from mainstream school. Having had a disrupted educational background, pupils join the centre with significant gaps in their skills and knowledge, and often with a jaundiced view about themselves and towards education. The amount of time pupils spend at the centre varies, but the rate of progress is such that the large majority successfully makes up for some of the lost time.

Pupils' confidence and demeanour develop quickly as they experience an extremely supportive learning environment and individualised learning programmes which enable them to succeed. For all pupils, this response is a substantial change when set against the personal challenges they have faced in the past and with which they continue to struggle. Pupils' readiness to become involved in learning, as seen in English when they explored and discussed the different images associated with sport, reflect good learning. Pupils also show great satisfaction in completing practical tasks and talking about what they are doing in lessons that engage them and draw upon their interests. In food technology, for example, pupils prepared and cooked a meal for lunch. In information and communication technology, pupils prepared an animation using a commercial software program. Progress in literacy and numeracy is good. Some pupils show great pride in their work, although extended writing remains a challenge for most. Practical and creative skills, shown in subjects such as physical education and art, are often well developed. Because individual needs are identified from the start, there are no significant variations in the rates of progress made by boys and girls, or those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils say they feel exceptionally safe and gain confidence in an environment that has firm boundaries and clear expectations that are consistently applied. Pupils make good progress in learning about themselves and improving their self-esteem because of the sensitive and individualised support provided by staff and other professionals. Pupils see their time in the centre as an opportunity to turn their lives around and behaviour is good.

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Pupils are friendly and polite, and talk with staff and visitors in a mature and respectful manner. Pupils particularly like the respect they are shown by staff and that their views are valued. Pupils' positive attitudes towards activities, including cooking and sports activities, have led to them taking a greater pride in their work and adopting healthier lifestyles.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The strengths of teaching lie in detailed planning based upon a thorough knowledge of each pupil and the collaborative approach taken by teachers and other adults, who provide individualised support. Well-developed relationships with pupils help staff to manage behaviour and encourage them into doing their best. Questioning is used well to probe pupils' understanding and help adjust the pace of learning. The teachers' supportive and sensitive approach helps to raise expectations, manage behaviour and coax pupils into doing their best. Lesson objectives are made clear to pupils to ensure, for example, that they understand what skills they will develop during the lesson. Where teaching was less successful, introductions were long and pupils were not involved early enough. Assessment is closely linked to individual behaviour and academic targets. It is also used to help pupils celebrate progress and achievement.

Particular attention is given to addressing pupils' emotional and/or social needs in the first instance. The personal, social and health education programme underpins the curriculum

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and forms a significant part of each pupil's personalised learning programme. Attractive and informative displays give an insight into the range of pupils' learning experiences. For pupils in Years 7 to 9, the curriculum provides a carefully considered balance between basic skills in literacy and numeracy and the development of individualised support and learning experiences that reflect their interests and closely match their needs. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, the range of courses and activities include a realistic approach towards courses leading to GCSEs and opportunities for pupils to achieve external accreditation in, for example, skills related to some aspects of the building industry, and hair and beauty.

The outstanding support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care is recognised and valued by parents and carers. One parent's comment represents the positive response made by others: 'I cannot praise the centre strongly enough. After years of trouble he is a changed teenager... he is treated as an individual... and they keep me informed every step of the way.' Pupils have a good understanding of their targets for personal development and appreciate how the consistent and sensitive support helps them improve their behaviour and social skills. Pupils are extremely well known by staff, who leave no stone unturned to ensuring that they receive very close attention. Staff are very alert to the fact that no two days are alike and pupils can arrive on any day with varying levels of interest and willingness to engage. Attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected not just in opportunities for physical activity but also in the provision of healthy food and health-related courses. The outstanding support and guidance are recognised by local schools who value the quality of the timely and skilful support they receive, together with the positive influence it has on pupils who are at risk of exclusion.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers, under the strong leadership of a determined and resourceful headteacher, are well on the path to establishing a centre which places a high priority on achieving excellence in all aspects of its work. The headteacher has managed change very effectively by ensuring that the individual is at the hub of the provision which promotes equality and tackles any form of discrimination exceptionally well. The re-organisation of staff and improvements to the curriculum have led to an increased focus on achievement for all pupils.

The well-qualified management committee, which includes members of the local authority and headteachers from local schools, provides a good level of challenge and support. It is well placed to help the centre move forward. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to its work and safeguarding procedures are highly systematic, continually reviewed and very

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firmly established. All staff benefit from appropriate training. Strong links with outside agencies are highly effective in making a contribution to the wide ranging achievements of pupils, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement. Community cohesion is promoted exceptionally well in the two areas where the provision is located. However, staff know that they have not yet developed links with areas further afield in this country and others to the same level, and are appropriately planning to do so. Parents and carers are closely involved with the planning of their children's provision. The centre works extremely hard with families to maximise the support it can provide.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

An overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaires expressed positive views about the centre's work. A small minority of parents or carers made written comments. All of these expressed considerable satisfaction with the centre and included positive remarks about the influence the centre is having on their children's behaviour and attitudes at home, the caring and welcoming environment, and the quality of the staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rivers Education Support Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 17 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 55 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	35	8	47	2	12	1	6
The school keeps my child safe	12	71	4	24	1	6	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	13	76	3	18	1	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	65	4	24	2	12	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	88	1	6	1	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	76	4	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	71	4	24	1	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	13	76	3	18	1	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	76	2	12	2	12	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	71	3	18	2	12	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	76	2	12	2	12	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	76	2	12	2	12	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	76	3	18	1	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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.



31 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rivers Education Support Centre, Hoddesdon, EN11 0AA

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your centre. We enjoyed talking to you and listening to your interesting views. You told us that the centre makes a substantial difference to your behaviour and attitudes to learning. It is clear that you value the life-changing opportunities that the centre offers you.

This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. It is a good centre, where you feel extremely safe and secure and enjoy taking part in the interesting activities. It is a place that is enabling you to be successful and to learn more effectively than you were able to in the past. Staff have high expectations of you and provide clear guidelines for you to follow. Almost all your parents and carers expressed considerable satisfaction with the centre. Here are some other important things about your centre.

It is exceptionally well led and managed.

Effective teaching helps you to make good progress.

Behaviour is good and you are considerate towards each other.

You achieve well when account is taken of your starting points when you join.

Pupils in Years 7 to 9 usually make a successful return to mainstream schools.

The majority of those in Years 10 and 11 are on track to reach standards that are broadly similar to those found in mainstream schools.

Most of those in Years 10 and 11 go on to college, employment or training.

All staff take extremely good care of you, and make sure you have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements in its provision.

Ensure that those of you who are waiting to go to another school, more suited to your needs, do so as quickly as possible.

Increase the range of learning opportunities for those of you in Years 10 and 11 to help you get a wider range of qualifications for enrolment at college or to gain employment.

We wish each one of you every success in your future and hope that you continue to help yourselves to make things better.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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