

Riverside School

Main Road, St Paul's Cray, Orpington, Kent BR5 3HS

Inspection dates

30 April–1 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have left no stone unturned in their work to improve pupils' outcomes. Their well-focused actions have paid dividends. Pupils now receive an outstanding education, which is highly personalised to their individual needs.
- Across the school, behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are polite and respectful to adults and to each other. Staff know exactly how to help pupils feel secure and manage their behaviour.
- Teaching is imaginative and fun. Teachers plan tasks that are closely matched to pupils' needs. Pupils try hard and maintain high levels of concentration. Pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- A rich and inviting curriculum, which uses the school's strengths in the expressive and performing arts, makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and other outcomes.
- Governors are well informed about all aspects of the school's work. They hold leaders to account rigorously, so that the quality of education is continually strengthened. However, the systems for leaders and governors to identify areas for improvement are not always used sharply enough.
- Leadership of the early years provision is highly effective. Children benefit from high-quality teaching and excellent levels of pastoral care. As a result, they make exceptional progress.
- The sixth-form provision is excellent. Through the personalised curriculum, students have plentiful opportunities to develop and apply their skills, for instance through community projects and work experience. Students are prepared exceptionally well for their next steps.
- Leaders have ensured a culture of safeguarding that permeates throughout the school. Parents and carers praise the school's work to keep their children safe and ensure that they are well cared for. As one parent put it: 'My son loves school and the care and support he is given is utterly amazing.'
- Leaders and staff have an in-depth knowledge of each pupil's needs. They are skilled in planning and providing bespoke levels of support so that pupils flourish, both academically and in their personal development. Strong partnerships with external agencies contribute well to this work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen systems for evaluating the school's performance so that leaders and governors pinpoint what they can do to have greater impact on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders work together exceptionally well to ensure that pupils benefit from an excellent quality of education. Their high aspirations are tangible and underpin the school's ambitious ethos. This is matched by an equal commitment to ensuring that pupils benefit from exceptional levels of pastoral care and guidance. Staff at all levels share the leaders' vision. This contributes to a strong sense of community, in which both leaders and staff know precisely what they need to do to ensure that pupils make outstanding gains in their learning and development over time.
- A very clear culture of mutual tolerance and respect permeates the school. Pupils are taught about the similarities and differences between different people, cultures and religions, and all adults at the school provide strong role models. The school's curriculum has a strong focus on preparing pupils for adulthood and to become active members of British society.
- Leaders, including governors, know the school very well. They use effective systems to check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is based on regular and meaningful visits to classrooms. Sometimes, the actions to improve teaching are not always clear enough in the school's plans for improvement.
- New staff are supported very well to become part of the school's ethos. Leaders provide an excellent programme of additional training to ensure that all staff continually update and advance their skills in specialist approaches.
- The leadership team places mutual respect and individual dignity at the heart of the school's work. Leaders' high expectations for both pupils and staff are evident in the school's nurturing and calm atmosphere.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work, with words such as 'amazing' and 'fantastic' being typical of the comments made. They particularly value how leaders use different ways to involve them in school life. For example, expressive arts projects are used very well to help parents understand how they might support their children's learning at home.
- The curriculum is impressive. Leaders keep the curriculum under constant review to make sure it is both ambitious and personalised to pupils' needs and abilities. For instance, leaders draw effectively on the creative, expressive and performing arts to immerse pupils in their learning. Additional resources, including the pupil premium funding and the sports premium funding, are used exceptionally well in a coordinated way to maximise the impact of the curriculum for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.
- The school prepares pupils very well for life in modern Britain. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. They have plentiful opportunities to improve their independence in a range of meaningful situations, including travelling on public transport and shopping for food.
- Leaders set targets for pupils which are strongly rooted in their education, health and care plans. Staff plan very well together and use the school's excellent resources to devise 'irresistible' opportunities for learning. This leads to significant improvements in

pupils' educational achievements over time, as well as substantial progress in their personal and social development.

- Leaders make sure that teachers' subject knowledge is of the highest quality. This includes a range of specialist approaches, which teachers use very effectively to support pupils' complex needs. 'Professional learning groups' help teachers continually to learn and reflect on how they teach, making them even more effective. Teachers regularly observe their colleagues. As a result, the best practice is shared throughout the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong. Governors reflect carefully on how to use their expertise and knowledge, so that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
- Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's work, including its strengths and key priorities. Together, they use well-focused visits to the school to make sure that they have suitably detailed and reliable information about the quality of pupils' learning. This enables governors to support and challenge leaders effectively, so that pupils' outcomes go from strength to strength.
- Governors' oversight of safeguarding and the use of additional funding is rigorous.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, governors and staff undertake regular and appropriate training in safeguarding to ensure that they know and understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff are alert to potential signs that pupils may be at harm and to different safeguarding risks, including the ways in which pupils' complex needs may make them more vulnerable to abuse. The school's policy reflects the latest requirements concerning child protection.
- When concerns about pupils' well-being arise, staff respond promptly and effectively. Leaders follow up concerns rigorously and make sure that safeguarding records are accurate and suitably detailed. When necessary, leaders do not hesitate to involve external agencies so that pupils and their families receive extra help and support when they need it. Governors check these procedures thoroughly and have ensured that they have the expertise on the governing body to do this well.
- The curriculum supports pupils to become aware of the risks that they might face and how to avoid them, in an age-appropriate way. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are kept safe and well cared for. For example, one parent said: 'I have recently started a full-time job and I know my son is in safe hands and is happy there.'
- Leaders ensure that the site is safe and suitable and takes account of pupils' needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers plan pupils' learning exceptionally well, centred on their detailed knowledge of pupils' individual needs and interests. All adults, including external professionals, work together highly effectively to make sure that teaching is sharply focused on helping pupils to make substantial gains over time, both academically and in their attitudes to learning.
- In classrooms, adults are skilled at helping pupils to make choices, communicate their opinions and demonstrate what they know and remember. Assistive technologies and pictorial communication strategies enhance pupils' ability to express themselves and share their ideas. The expertise of staff in this area is a clear strength. Nevertheless, leaders are not complacent and have clear plans in place to strengthen these strategies even more. Leaders track how well pupils are doing and monitor this progress very closely. They check that pupils who are disadvantaged or have additional vulnerabilities are doing as well as all other pupils.
- Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They constantly check that pupils are ready to learn, for example by making sure that their physical and sensory needs are fully met. In classrooms, pupils have opportunities to learn and interact with their friends, which helps them to develop their personal and social skills.
- Teachers make sure that work is personalised for each pupil. Most-able pupils are challenged well and have opportunities to learn how to read and decode text. Many pupils access literacy through a multi-sensory approach, which is stimulating and matched to their needs very well.
- In mathematics, pupils experience a wide range of interesting and engaging ways to explore concepts and develop their numeracy skills. Staff correct any misunderstandings and pupils are helped to learn from their mistakes. As a result, pupils make excellent progress in developing their mathematical understanding and skills over time.
- Teachers benefit from the high-quality advice and support of specialist therapists and practitioners. The school's relationships with these professionals are very constructive, and their expert advice is incorporated particularly well into the programmes offered to pupils. This collaborative work has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Teachers are highly skilled at providing just the right levels of encouragement during activities to motivate pupils to do their very best. Teachers use a range of approaches to keep pupils focused and, as a result, pupils work hard in lessons and achieve very well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The rich curriculum provides many opportunities to support pupils' personal development and welfare. 'Happiness passports' provide staff with a detailed overview

of how to support each individual pupil. For instance, the 'passports' include important information on how each pupil likes to learn, how best to support their nutrition and health, information about their dreams and aspirations for the future, and how pupils like to be responded to if they need support to manage their behaviour.

- Because the school places an equally strong emphasis on personal development and welfare as it does on academic progress, pupils make spectacular improvements in vital areas that parents have said are important to them for their child. For example, in the early years, one parent was particularly impressed that her child has learned how to use the toilet independently. This was the result of a carefully planned programme of small steps.
- Parents overwhelmingly support the school's focus on independence. As pupils move through the school, they become increasingly involved in setting personal goals for themselves, which gives them an excellent preparation for later life.
- The school provides appropriate and individualised advice, guidance and support on future careers. All pupils have opportunities to experience the world of work, tailored to their needs.
- The school has a particular strength in the expressive and performing arts, which are used very effectively to develop pupils' abilities in many areas including communication, well-being, personal development and social development. A wide variety of visits to events and performances enrich the curriculum and create enduring memories for pupils and families. The school's recent involvement in a singing project and an encounter with Prince Harry were particular high points for all involved.
- Teachers and other adults at the school find every opportunity to support pupils to develop and maintain friendships. In lessons, pupils often work alongside each other and benefit enormously from this important social interaction.
- The school prides itself on its 'pursuit of happiness' for all pupils. These inspiring words are truly put into action by leaders at all levels. All staff have worked together to create a warm and caring environment where pupils flourish. Pupils are rightly very proud of their work and achievements, and the school ensures that these are celebrated at every opportunity.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Staff have very high expectations and manage pupils' behaviour sensitively and consistently. This stems both from their understanding of pupils' needs and from the school's philosophy that 'all behaviour is communication'. As a result, staff swiftly adapt their strategies and the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils, so that behaviour is quickly improved. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for managing their own behaviour as they get older.
- Pupils feel safe at the school and their parents agree. The school is very quick to deal with any isolated incidents of pupils hurting each other.
- Leaders and staff do their utmost to ensure that pupils attend regularly. They work closely with families and external agencies effectively. For instance, they help pupils to

catch up on any missed learning when they have been unavoidably absent due to their medical needs.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Across all key stages and subjects, pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points. Most pupils begin at the school in the early years and remain at the school for their whole school career. By the time pupils leave the school, usually at age 19, they are very well prepared for their next steps. All pupils who left the school last year have remained in the college placement that they went on to.
- Pupils make excellent improvements in their basic skills. English and mathematics are taught well across the school in fun and engaging lessons. Support staff are used very effectively to help pupils achieve their full potential. Leaders carefully track the progress of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. There are no differences in the progress of different groups of pupils.
- In lessons, teachers place a very strong emphasis on developing pupils' language and communication skills. Speech therapists work very well with teachers and other staff to model and advise on specialist interventions. This impressive and coordinated team-work is an important factor in the outstanding progress that pupils make in their communication skills.
- Most pupils at the school require additional targeted support to maintain or improve their physical skills and abilities. Leaders have ensured that the school day is well structured and efficiently organised to accommodate and maximise opportunities for these essential activities and programmes to take place. This includes the use of specialist therapies, including on-site hydrotherapy, which are expertly planned and delivered.
- Staff promote pupils' social and emotional development exceedingly well through rich and varied lessons. Pupils learn how to recognise their emotions and about the things that make them happy. Pupils are supported to talk about how they are feeling, including pupils who need additional support to do this, for example from communication devices and technology.
- Pupils are taught how to be independent from the earliest opportunity. All staff are patient and well trained, taking time to allow pupils to think and respond. The whole-school approach of supporting pupils to do as much for themselves as possible has an excellent impact on pupils' outcomes. When pupils need it, teachers and other staff provide help and support sensitively and with dignity.
- Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Those who shared their views as part of the inspection agree that their children are making significant progress in their education and their personal development.
- The school's very detailed evidence of pupils' progress, including photographic and video evidence, is collected meticulously over time. Adults often provide a comprehensive written commentary to accompany these records. Teachers' judgements of pupils' progress are moderated to make sure they are accurate and consistent across the school.

- Some pupils record their work in workbooks and this work is of a high standard and shows that pupils make strong progress over time.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of the early years is highly effective in ensuring that children get off to the best possible start to their time at Riverside.
- Leaders focus relentlessly on making sure that the quality of teaching and the curriculum is of the highest quality. Staff who are new to the school or at the early stages of their career benefit from excellent levels of training and guidance so that the quality of teaching is consistently very strong across the early years. There is an excellent team spirit in the department, and staff share ideas and plan together to ensure consistency.
- As a result of excellent teaching, children in the early years make exceptionally strong progress in developing communication and language skills. They make excellent progress in their physical, personal, social and emotional development. Children are moved on to more challenging work as soon as they are ready. For example, children were challenged to recall and practise counting up to 20 and beyond.
- Teachers and other staff build strong and trusting relationships with families very quickly and work together to settle children into the school. Parents say that communication from the school is 'excellent' and that staff take the time to tell them about their child's well-being as well as educational progress.
- The learning environments inside and outside are stimulating and well organised to ensure that children have access to a range of learning opportunities. Staff provide activities which allow children opportunities to learn through play and exploration and to enhance their communication, personal, social and emotional development. Staff know when to allow children time to explore activities and when to step in to extend their learning.
- Leaders and staff plan carefully to ensure that children's transition to key stage 1 is smooth. They share strategies that support children to learn well and feel secure.
- Leaders and other staff record detailed information on how well children learn. They use this information very well to select tasks and resources that enable children to make substantial gains in their development over time.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Excellent leadership means that the quality of education in the sixth form is as strong as that found in other areas of the school. Teachers use resources that are age-appropriate and relevant. Students enjoy a wide variety of opportunities to practise in the community the skills they are learning at school. All staff are committed to making learning relevant for students. They work hard to ensure that lessons are fun and engaging.

- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is exemplary. They work very well together and support each other to succeed. Study programmes in the sixth form are of a high quality and build on prior learning from earlier key stages. Leaders ensure that the curriculum places a strong emphasis on independence and moving on to the next stage of education and adult life. For example, some students are learning how to travel independently using public transport.
- Most students go on to local colleges and undertake courses that they have been well prepared for. Last year, all the pupils who moved on to college placements are still on the course they started. Leaders make sure that the sixth-form curriculum is closely tailored to students' interests and aspirations, including for further education and employment. As a result, students are exceedingly well prepared for their next steps.
- Staff make excellent use of high-quality community activities and work experience to support pupils' personal development very well. Leaders leave no stone unturned to ensure that students in the sixth form have opportunities to experience work that is meaningful for them. An impressively wide range of employers are engaged with the school and offer work placements in their own companies. Options include floristry, window cleaning, hairdressing and beauty therapy and gardening. Many employers also respond to students needs by offering work tasters and workshops at the school.
- Work folders in the sixth form show a wide variety of appropriate activities. These activities prepare students well for accreditation, which is well matched to students' needs, abilities and future destinations. Students make excellent progress during their time in the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	135232
Local authority	Bromley
Inspection number	10088799

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	275
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katrina O'Leary
Headteacher	Steve Solomons
Telephone number	01689 870 519
Website	www.riversideschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@riverside.bromley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 June 2018

Information about this school

- Riverside School caters for pupils who have severe or complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. It is situated over two sites, Riverside St. Paul's Cray and Riverside Beckenham. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or are in the process of assessment.
- One in three pupils is eligible for pupil premium funding.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased significantly over the past few years.
- The school now admits pupils from the age of three years old.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all key stages and on both sites. All observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and evidence of pupils' progress with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day, including in lessons. Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and in groups.
- Inspectors met with middle and senior leaders, a range of staff members and members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the local authority's director of education services.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. Inspectors also looked at information from the school's website, school policies, minutes from governing body meetings, information related to pupils' progress, behaviour records, attendance information, the school's single central record of staff suitability, risk assessments, health and safety information and safeguarding records.
- Inspectors spoke to parents who were bringing their children to the school. Inspectors also considered responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and free-text responses. Inspectors took into account views expressed in the survey completed by staff. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Gary Pocock, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Shaun Dodds	Ofsted Inspector
Angela Corbett	Ofsted Inspector

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