

Inspection of Rugeley School

Blithbury Road, Blithbury, Rugeley, Staffordshire WS15 3JQ

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school that makes a positive difference to pupils and their families. Comments from parents and carers reflect the caring and supportive nature of leaders and staff. Staff know pupils really well and work hard to meet their individual needs. Pupils feel safe because staff understand them and look after them.

Overall, pupils conduct themselves well and in most instances are engaged in their learning. Leaders have established clear routines. Pupils benefit from this structure because it helps them to manage their emotions. Staff support pupils to know what appropriate behaviour looks like. Leaders provide additional support when required. Bullying is unlikely to happen due to the high level of support and supervision that every pupil receives. However, leaders and staff are alert to any potential incidents.

Leaders, supported by the proprietor body, have high expectations of pupils and staff. They have introduced a range of changes that are having a positive impact on pupils' education and wider learning experiences. However, leaders are aware that they need to refine some of these changes. This is to make sure that the needs of pupils following the sensory pathway achieve the best possible outcomes.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders organise a range of checks on pupils' starting points and learning behaviours when they join the school. Staff use these findings, alongside targets from pupils' educational, health and care (EHC) plans, to set learning outcomes for individual pupils. This supports leaders' aim for every pupil to follow a personalised learning programme that meets their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum has two pathways: a formal pathway and a sensory pathway. In addition, post-16 students follow a curriculum that prepares them for life after Rugeley School.

Leaders have reviewed the subject-specific knowledge and skills that pupils learn over time. Teachers value this guidance because it identifies what they need to teach and when they need to teach it. Pupils learn new things that build on what they already know about a subject. As a result, they achieve well. However, in their efforts to make the curriculum more ambitious, leaders have lost sight of some of the essential skills that some pupils need to develop to access the formal curriculum.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge in a wide range of subjects. In most instances, they plan activities that meet the needs of pupils. Staff explain new learning in a step-by-step manner and give clear instructions. They check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching if required. This is supported by staff's skilful use of communication aids when required. As a result, pupils experience success in their learning. However, for pupils who follow the sensory pathway, there are some instances where learning activities are not appropriate. In these instances, pupils do not possess the necessary skills to access their learning and they lose interest.

Leaders recognise the importance of developing pupils' early reading and phonics skills. Staff teach formal phonics well because they have been well trained. As a result, pupils develop their early reading skills well. Staff have prioritised promoting a love of reading in the school. Consequently, some pupils enjoy reading and sharing books with adults.

Leaders have reviewed and redesigned the sixth-form curriculum to ensure that there is a focus on preparation for adulthood. The curriculum focuses on independent living, preparing for further education and community engagement. Weekly Duke of Edinburgh's Award activities provide further opportunities for students to develop skills and resilience through a variety of exciting outdoor pursuits. Due to all of this, students are becoming increasingly prepared for life after Rugeley School. However, leaders are not complacent. They are determined to further develop the provision for students who transfer to residential care or assisted living.

Pupils' personal development is a whole-school priority. The relationships and sex education curriculum supports this. Staff help pupils to understand what is, and what is not appropriate in different relationships. They do this in a context that pupils understand. The school council and the eco council are active. The purchase of outdoor equipment and the introduction of the occasional cooked breakfast are a direct result of their work. Pupils learn about other religions and cultures. They were celebrating the Holi festival during the inspection, which was a very 'colourful' experience. Special events are peppered throughout the school year, such as pumpkin picking, performances for parents and enrichment weeks. Pupils value and benefit from these opportunities and experiences.

The careers programme begins in Year 8 as part of a pupil's annual review. Staff support pupils to articulate their future aspirations and plot a pathway towards these. This is supported by subsequent meetings with an external careers adviser and a variety of work-based placements. Leaders are rightly proud of the destinations that their students move on to, including further education colleges.

The proprietor body and school leaders are keen for pupils to be the best they can be. They have put systems in place to help them keep an eye on what is happening in school. However, the checks that they make on the curriculum are not sharp enough. This means that some areas for improvement are not identified as quickly as they could be.

Staff are right behind leaders in their efforts to improve the school. Teachers agree that workload is a challenge, but they recognise the positive changes that leaders have made to reduce it. Staff comment that leaders are considerate of their well-being. Individual staff give examples of how leaders have supported them when they needed it.

Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, as a suitable accessibility plan is in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor body has made sure that all leaders and staff are well trained. Leaders and staff understand pupils' increased vulnerability due to their additional needs. As a result, everyone knows how to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Training includes updates linked to government guidance as well as specific aspects, such as domestic violence. Pupils name a variety of trusted adults who they would go to if they were worried about something. They say this makes them feel safe.

The safeguarding policy meets current statutory guidance and is available on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum does not sufficiently map out the knowledge and skills that pupils on the sensory pathway need to develop as prerequisites for the formal curriculum. As a result, some pupils following the sensory pathway do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should make sure that the sensory pathway is underpinned by the prerequisite knowledge and skills that pupils need to access the formal curriculum.
- Leaders' strategic oversight of the curriculum is not sharp enough. As a result, they have not identified some areas of the curriculum that need to be improved quickly enough. Leaders should ensure that effective systems are in place to identify any deficiencies in the curriculum, so that they can remedy these in a timely manner.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	132735
DfE registration number	860/6024
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10267624
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aspris Children's Services Ltd
Chair	John Anderson
Headteacher	Lisa Price
Annual fees (day pupils)	£90,542 to £137,782
Telephone number	01889 504400
Website	www.aspriscs.co.uk
Email address	rugeleyschool@aspriscs.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	15 to 17 October 2019

Information about this school

- Rugeley School is an independent residential special school. It is situated in Blithbury in Staffordshire.
- The school caters for pupils who have an autism spectrum condition. Pupils have complex needs and some display challenging behaviours. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- A range of local authorities place pupils in the school. Most pupils arrive and leave the school by local authority-funded transport.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Since the previous inspection, the name of the proprietor body has changed.
- The school's last full inspection was in October 2019. The school was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was announced with 20 minutes' notice at the request of the Department for Education.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the proprietor body's representative and the chair of governors.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders to discuss safeguarding, provision for pupils with SEND, pupils' attendance, sixth form, careers and pupils' behaviour.
- As part of the inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, physical development and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with senior leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school.
- The lead inspector toured the school premises to check their suitability.

- Safeguarding documents were checked, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children. Inspectors checked that staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures effectively across the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. An inspector held a virtual meeting with four parents during the inspection and spoke to parents at the end of the school day.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records and minutes of meetings held by the governing body.

Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Pollitt

His Majesty's Inspector

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