

The Rowans

Silverbank, Churchill Avenue, Chatham, Kent, ME5 0LB

Inspection dates 26–27 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students' achievement is outstanding. They make excellent progress and, for many of them, it is the first time that they have experienced success in education.
- Year 11 leavers gain a wide variety of recognised academic and vocational qualifications which enable them to go on to employment, training or apprenticeships.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and the senior team has brought about significant, rapid and sustained improvement since the last inspection.
- The school has rigorous and highly effective systems for checking on students' progress and on the quality of teaching.
- The management committee is highly knowledgeable about all aspects of the school and provides excellent support and challenge to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- Teachers are expert at gaining students' interest and challenging them to improve their work. Students respond extremely positively and the vast majority want to do well.
- Students make outstanding progress in English, particularly in reading, and in mathematics.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around school is typically outstanding. Students show respect for each other and for adults.
- The school's procedures for keeping students safe in school are excellent and they say they feel extremely safe. They know that there are adults to whom they can turn if they need support.
- The school places importance on coming to school regularly. In most cases, when students join the school, their attendance improves significantly. Attendance rates are close to those in mainstream secondary schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 15 lessons or parts of lessons, most of which were jointly observed with members of the leadership team.
- There were too few responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, to consider but inspectors took account of the school's own surveys and other records of contact with parents and carers.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff and several students. They spoke to the chair and five other members of the management committee, including a parent, as well as to two representatives from the local authority.
- Documents reviewed included the school's self-evaluation and development plans, financial records. Inspectors scrutinised teachers' planning and assessment records, samples of students' work, policies and procedures, management committee minutes and attendance records.

Inspection team

Grace Marriott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Nicholas Hunt

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- The Rowans has gone through a period of change since the last inspection when, along with The Oaks, it was one of two units in the Silverbank Centre. In practice however, The Rowans operated as a separate school with its own headteacher, management committee and budget.
- Since the previous inspection, the two units have become completely separate. The Oaks closed and Inspire, a free school for students with severe behavioural, social and emotional needs, opened on the same site.
- The school name officially changed to The Rowans in the autumn term 2014.
- The Rowans caters for students who have been permanently excluded from school or who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Most will remain at The Rowans for the rest of their school career.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs is well above the national average. A small number of students are learning English as an additional language.
- Most pupils are White British and there are many more boys than girls.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or in local authority care) is well above average.
- All courses are taught at The Rowans with the exception of physical education, which is taught using off-site facilities but by Rowans school staff. The school does not use alternative providers.
- The headteacher has led the school since January 2013, first as acting headteacher and now as the substantive headteacher.
- The management committee has now taken over full responsibility for The Rowans and has the same responsibilities as the governing bodies of other maintained schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To raise standards in writing to match fully the standards in reading, the school should:
 - extend the range of opportunities for students to write for a wider variety of purposes in subjects other than English.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The partnership between the headteacher and her deputy is the driving force behind the improvement in the school. Their rigour and high expectations ensure that the school provides an outstanding education where students flourish. Staff, students and the management committee share their vision for the school.
- The leadership team has responded well to advice received following monitoring visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors in order to improve the school further.
- Senior leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the school's performance. They use the information gained to help them make decisions about priorities for school staffing, subjects and courses. They also ensure subject leaders and those with responsibilities for particular aspects of the school's work make a strong contribution to its development.
- Regular and thorough checks on the quality of teaching and students' progress ensure consistency across different subjects. The leadership team pick up quickly on any dips in performance and take prompt and appropriate action. Teachers know that they are accountable for their students' progress. Teachers receive highly effective support to develop their skills and every opportunity to improve. This approach has contributed well to securing high quality teaching over time.
- Leaders and the management committee ensure that pupil premium funding is used to very good effect to provide additional support for disadvantaged students. As a result, gaps between these students' attainment and others are closing.
- Staff at The Rowans work closely with other schools to share information about students and make sure that the provision meets their needs. They also keep the schools well-informed about how well students are doing.
- The curriculum meets students' needs very effectively and equality of opportunity is promoted well. The management of the provision for students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is highly effective. The curriculum is planned carefully to make sure it meets students' requirements effectively.
- In Key Stage 3, students take a similar range of subjects to students in mainstream schools. In Key Stage 4, in addition to English, mathematics and science, students can opt for a range of academic and work-related subjects. These usually include art, music, health and social care, hospitality and design and technology.
- The school prepares students very well for life in modern Britain through personal and social education, careers education, life skills and support for charities. Opportunities to take part in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Sports Leadership are valued by students. British values, including tolerance and respect for differences, are promoted well.
- Students confirmed that very good individual guidance helps them make informed choices about further education, employment or apprenticeships. Students are ambitious and keen to continue in education or training.
- Keeping pupils safe is an important part of the school's work and arrangements for safeguarding fully meet statutory requirements. All staff are appropriately trained and know what to do in the event of any concerns or issues arising. Safeguarding processes are highly effective.
- The local authority has worked well with the school to help establish it as a separate and very effective school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee includes serving headteachers and parents. The committee know the strengths of the school and the areas where it could be doing even better. It is determined to see that the school continues to improve. Members bring considerable expertise and a wide range of skills and experience to their work. This enables them to drive up expectations for improvement. They willingly use their specialist expertise to support the school, for example in regularly working with senior staff to analyse progress data and set targets. They also make sure that school finances are managed efficiently and effectively. They regularly review information about students' progress and the quality of teaching. They use this information wisely to make decisions about pay and promotion. The management committee are very clear about their statutory responsibilities and ensure that the school is meeting all requirements for safeguarding. The work of the management committee has been highly significant in improving the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. The school is orderly, purposeful and focused on learning. Students respect their environment and the school is free from graffiti and litter.
- Most students join the school with a history of poor behaviour. They settle quickly. As a result, students' behaviour in lessons and around school improves rapidly. The number of exclusions has dropped significantly.
- Guidance and expectations for behaviour are clear. Students know they have to keep the rules and to quote one student, 'We don't mess about in lessons.' They are also extremely positive about staff support. Another student said, 'This place changes lives.'
- Staff are quick to pick up on times when extra support may be needed. Very strong links with parents, carers and different agencies means that the school is able to provide students with specialist help when needed.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning. They are highly focused on improving their grades. Staff are patient and continue to encourage them if they are finding something particularly difficult.
- Attendance is much higher than in most similar schools. Almost all students improve their attendance and punctuality and this helps them to achieve more.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Staff take their responsibilities very seriously.
- Student surveys show that they feel safe and, in discussion, they said that what they do in school helps them to stay safe out of school. Students know the risks involved in the misuse of social media and the internet as well as understanding how harmful other forms of bullying can be, such as homophobic and racist bullying.
- Parents and carers responding to the school's own questionnaire did not identify any concerns about bullying. Students with whom this was discussed said that bullying incidents are rare and they are confident that they would be very swiftly dealt with.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- From the point where students join the school, staff quickly establish excellent relationships which help students to settle down and make outstanding progress.
- Teachers use a variety of approaches to motivate students. Teaching is particularly effective in helping students to see how much they have achieved and motivating them to do even better.
- Planning is based on detailed knowledge of students' achievement and is closely matched to individual learning needs. This results in students of all abilities, including the most able, gaining in confidence and making excellent progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Students respond particularly well to opportunities for practical work. In a music lesson, for example, interesting challenges and skillful teaching enabled students to create their own music, using computer technology successfully.
- The teaching of literacy and mathematics is outstanding and enables students to make rapid progress. The school has made the teaching of reading a particularly high priority. In a Key Stage 3 reading lesson, a popular choice of book really engaged students' interest. They were reading confidently and discussing the text with high levels of enjoyment.
- Teachers give students many opportunities to use and develop their reading skills in other subjects as well as in English lessons. Writing for a variety of purposes is also regarded as important but progress, though still excellent, is not quite as rapid as it is in reading. Sometimes opportunities for writing in other subjects are missed.
- The school makes very good use of well-planned and sharply focused support sessions to meet specific individual needs. These are checked carefully and, if progress is not fast enough, the approaches are changed.
- Teaching assistants are very well deployed to support individual students. They are well-briefed about lessons and are able to act using their own initiative to ensure that students take a full part in lessons.
- Teachers assess students' work regularly and use questioning well in lessons to check understanding. Marking and feedback are positive, constructive and give students very good guidance on how to improve their work.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the school with knowledge and skills which are usually below, and often well below, the levels of most students of their age. This is usually because their progress has been affected by exclusions or poor attendance.
- In Key Stage 3, the careful match of work to individual needs means that students start to catch up rapidly and make outstanding progress, particularly in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.
- Students use their reading skills exceptionally well in different subjects. However, although their progress in writing is also outstanding, they do not get as many opportunities to practice their writing skills in other subjects.
- Students who join the school in Key Stage 4 have often made little progress in Key Stage 3. They start to make much faster progress and, in 2014, all students achieved recognised qualifications in English and mathematics. Occasionally the school uses early entry to GCSE to help challenge students to achieve more.
- The most able students are expected to aim high and are set challenging targets. They are currently on track to achieve the five GCSE passes at grade C or better, including English and mathematics. This allows them to move on to higher-level qualifications when they leave the school.
- GCSE attainment is still below the levels expected nationally, but much better than that in similar schools. Results in work-related courses leading to BTEC vocational qualifications are very similar to the national results.
- Throughout the school, very good relationships and excellent support, which is expertly matched to students' needs, ensures that students learn exceptionally well and make outstanding progress. Students make particularly rapid progress in improving their reading skills.
- There is relatively little difference in the rates of progress of different groups of students. Those with particular learning difficulties and those looked after by local authorities achieve equally well, as do those with English as an additional language. The school checks very carefully that additional funding is helping disadvantaged students to make better progress and the gap between these students and others has almost closed.

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 pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils 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 pupils' needs. Pupils 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 pupils 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

Unique reference number	132034
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	447720

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Pamela Conibeer
Headteacher	Caron Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 June 2013
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