

Riverbank School

Princethorpe Way, Coventry, West Midlands CV3 2QD

Inspection dates

10–11 May 2017

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Teaching and learning are outstanding. Pupils make exceptional progress, often from very low starting points. They achieve excellent results in a range of subjects and all are extremely well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
- The school provides life-changing education for all pupils. Pupils enjoy being at school. They learn and develop from the wide range of opportunities and options, both inside and outside the classroom.
- The headteacher and his team have created a community which is totally committed to improving the life chances of all pupils. They are tireless in their intention to continue building on this school's strengths.
- Communication between the school and parents is excellent and parents feel that their views are listened to and acted upon.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils display excellent manners and show consideration for others. They grow from being part of a very caring community.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Staff know their pupils very well, are highly vigilant and act promptly to keep pupils safe.
- Expectations in the sixth form are extremely high. Each student's personalised programme is monitored meticulously to ensure that they achieve their qualifications and are fully prepared for life beyond school.
- Governors and the trustees of the multi-academy trust know the school very well, are committed to supporting school leaders and share their vision for its future.
- Teachers and leaders assess pupils' progress very carefully and use this information to plan the next steps in their learning. Assessment in the wider curriculum is not as detailed as it is in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are not taught as much as they might be about different faiths and cultures in order to extend their understanding of the wider world.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend pupils' wider knowledge and experience of other faiths and cultures.
- Develop the school's assessment system, so that it includes all elements of the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is an inspirational leader. His passion for education has created an exceptional environment in which pupils can flourish. This is evident throughout the school's work. He is very well supported by senior and middle leaders who share his vision and beliefs. This is a school which has gone through a great deal of change over the past two years. This change process has been managed systematically and very effectively by those responsible for leading the school.
- The headteacher is fearless about challenging underperformance and relentless in his determination to make this school the best it can be. This ethos is transmitted down throughout the school and is intrinsic to every part of school life. High expectations are held by all members of staff, both of their own performance and of the outcomes for their pupils. Appointments have been made strategically to ensure that new members of staff share the vision and values of the school. This has created a cohesive and inspirational staff group.
- There is a professional culture which is rigorous and challenging but supportive. School leaders monitor teaching and progress extremely effectively. Teachers and other staff receive detailed and regular feedback, guidance and training. They are set demanding targets through the detailed appraisal system related to developing their own teaching and raising pupils' achievement. Staff share good practice in weekly meetings and everyone, including newly qualified teachers and learning support assistants, has been given opportunities to take a lead on an area of development. This means that staff feel able to be innovative and take risks in exploring what is best for the pupils in their care.
- School leaders and staff have worked very successfully over the past two years to introduce a varied and stimulating curriculum appropriate for all the pupils. In doing this, they carefully considered parents' comments and the changing needs of their pupil population. Pathways change each year in response to the pupils' needs, interests and aspirations. This has a very positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning, their behaviour in lessons and the outcomes they achieve. Pupils are very well prepared to make appropriate choices about their next stage of education, training or employment.
- The school's core values of 'Motivation, Creativity and Caring' shine through every aspect of pupils' lives. A great variety of enrichment activities complements and extends pupils' learning in classrooms. Pupils value the different experiences. They develop life skills such as taking turns, working as a team and strategic thinking. Other activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and 'forest school' push pupils to achieve things they did not think they were capable of.
- The school plans for pupils' progress and development through their school career, aiming to create individuals who will be happy for the rest of their lives. This ability to give pupils sound guidance, while being ready to make adaptations because of changing needs, ensures that equality of opportunity is assured for all pupils. No pupil suffers from any discrimination because of his or her special educational needs.

- The school's provision for pupils' social and moral development makes a highly effective contribution to pupils' behaviour and welfare. They discuss current topics in the news and explore their ideas about the wider world. Pupils are taught to look after their environment and this respect is reflected in their behaviour and around the school site. British values are promoted through debates and work on what it means to be British, and on democracy, racism and prejudice. This has helped to instil a shared understanding of tolerance for others. Work on different faiths and other cultures is not covered in the curriculum well enough to extend pupils' understanding and knowledge of the world beyond their immediate experience.
- The school's personalised approach identifies a separate learning path for every pupil and provides additional support and extra tuition where needed. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils, including those who are looked after, catch up and make excellent progress alongside all other pupils.
- The school uses additional funding effectively to establish and develop initiatives to support disadvantaged pupils. School leaders identify the barriers to learning of individual pupils and use pupil premium and catch-up funding to help pupils overcome these barriers. The use and the impact of this additional funding are questioned and challenged by governors to check that it is used in the best possible ways. Current progress information shows no appreciable difference in outcomes for any groups of pupils.
- Parents recognise the improvements they have seen in the school and their comments were extremely positive. They talk about the school being a community which listens to parents' concerns and acts upon them immediately: 'The staff go above and beyond for their pupils'.
- The school has received some support from other staff within the multi-academy trust. This has helped to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and extend the range of qualifications being offered to key stage 4 pupils. Currently, the headteacher provides support for behaviour and assessment to a few other special schools. The school has a vision to extend its outreach work and support more schools.
- All the adults spoken to, including parents, teachers, learning support assistants and governors, recognise that the school's leaders drive forward substantial improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour and have a considerable impact on ensuring appropriate provision for their children.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong and the local governing body, the board of trustees and the multi-academy trust regularly challenge the headteacher and ensure accountability. The governors have carefully monitored and evaluated the school's development through a period of major change. They clearly share the school's vision to be a centre for excellence and develop its capacity to support other special schools.
- The local governing body monitors leadership, teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes. Governors have a clear and detailed understanding of what the school has done to address previously identified areas for development. They are not afraid to ask probing questions to make sure that they are fully informed of the work of the school. They challenge the school to constantly improve.

- The board of trustees' strategic development plan supports the future development of Riverbank. The board has a detailed understanding of the school's finances. It ensures that the school is financially stable. It identifies the specialist requirements of a special school and is committed to maintaining the required level of support.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The work of the school's safeguarding team to keep pupils safe and secure is detailed and thorough. Pupils feel safe at school. Parents are assured that their children are looked after and always cared for.
- Pupils understand potential risks to their safety and can articulate how and why they keep themselves safe, including when online.
- Vigilance about safeguarding in this school is everyone's business. There are comprehensive procedures and communication systems that ensure that nobody slips through the net. The safeguarding lead is fully informed about potential radicalisation and extremism in the surrounding area and works very effectively with external agencies to take very prompt action should there be any concerns.
- Staff are committed in all their work to keeping pupils safe and reducing risk. This applies to all areas of the school environment, including the forest school area, and when pupils are attending external providers. Regular, high-quality training ensures that the practice of all members of staff is completely up to date. Staff live up to the school's ethos of being a caring community.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching enables pupils to make substantial progress, both academically and personally. Teachers have very high expectations of what all their pupils can achieve. Pupils show excellent attitudes in class, enjoy learning and are motivated to do their best.
- Teachers' careful planning ensures that teaching effectively meets pupils' needs. Teachers have a sound knowledge of their subjects and are adept at translating this to make it accessible and relevant to their pupils. Pupils are pushed to achieve through the challenge inherent in all lessons.
- Pupils' progress from their starting points is invariably good, and often better. Teachers listen astutely to pupils and ask probing questions. This helps boost pupils' learning very well. Teachers use assessment information well to promote learning and identify the next steps pupils need to take to improve their performance.

- Teachers are skilled at taking a complete view of their pupils' needs to make sure that they can learn in lessons. The development of English, mathematical and communication skills is embedded across the curriculum and all are responsible for teaching these subjects. An example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson where the teacher was teaching fractions, but also addressing the way pupils could physically move cubes around and encouraging pupils to discuss their work together, as well as developing independent learning skills. This reflects the teachers' deep understanding of their pupils' needs and the best ways in which they learn.
- Teachers are proactive in incorporating new strategies and sharing good practice to support the diverse needs of the school's changing population. An example of this is the range of enrichment activities offered at lunchtime which engage nearly all pupils in being able to practise and develop their learning in class. They also learn to develop their thinking and social skills by developing strategies and taking turns.
- Learning support assistants are briefed and deployed well. They know their pupils' needs well and often offer highly judicious encouragement and support. This helps pupils to focus on their learning and take risks where necessary. Adults occasionally intervene too early. This means that pupils' learning is hindered by not being allowed to make mistakes.
- Pupils are proud to talk about and show what they are doing. Work in pupils' books is consistently of a high quality and is very well presented. Impressive progress is made in all subjects over time. Art is a particular strength.
- Excellent relationships between staff and pupils underpin learning in classes. Teachers and learning support assistants model their expectations well and give pupils clear guidance on how to succeed. Pupils spoke to inspectors about their enjoyment of lessons, describing them as 'fun', and 'cool and exciting'. Pupils are motivated to do well. They want to achieve and can usually explain what they need to do to reach their targets.
- Feedback, both verbal and written, is direct and given in good time to ensure that pupils do not continue with mistakes. It tells them how to make their work even better. In a physical education lesson on rebound therapy, a group of key stage 3 pupils carefully observed one another's trampolining and discussed what was good and what could be done to make it even better. Pupils used that feedback to improve their performance.
- Interventions are well considered and used to excellent effect. The school employs two intervention officers to work with pupils. Pupils who did not reach their target for progress in English last year were given extra lessons and support with the specific elements of English they found difficult. Pupils who miss school are also supported with extra work at breaktimes or in enrichment times to make sure that they do not fall behind. Pupils studying for GCSE courses have benefited from extra support from curriculum leaders from the multi-academy trust who worked with them. The impact of this support is that nearly all pupils are now on track to meet their challenging targets this year in all year groups.

- Homework has been developed in imaginative and creative ways in response to pupils' needs and interests. It links to and extends learning in class and often includes activities that pupils can complete at home to share what they are learning with parents and develop their social skills. Homework tasks are set in different ways, such as using symbols or bingo cards, so they are accessible to all pupils and relevant to their individual needs and interests. This means that they achieve success outside school.
- Parents appreciate the regular and insightful feedback they are given about their children's progress and the open communication staff have with parents. One parent described how she now feels 'more engaged in my child's learning'.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are always positive. They are very proud of what they can do and how well the school supports them. This has a very strong impact on the progress they make.
- The school puts a lot of work into identifying and targeting pupils who are not in school every day. There are no groups of pupils whose learning is affected by poor attendance. A few new pupils find regular attendance at school very difficult and the school has put in place a range of measures to support them and their families. Pupils' attendance has risen markedly and there are far fewer pupils persistently absent.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils are reflected in the relationships between pupils. There is an all-pervading culture of caring for one another and wanting the best for everyone.
- The school has an effective system of rewards and incentives to promote high standards of behaviour. Pupils appreciate the way these are used consistently and are motivated to work towards targets. They encourage each other to achieve these goals.
- Pupils are taught how to keep healthy and can explain how they make healthy choices at lunchtime, and the benefits of taking part in sport and fitness activities.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online and know whom to go to if they have a problem or find anything which worries them. The school places a high importance on sex and relationships education, which is taught in a sensitive and appropriate manner to all pupils.
- Pupils appreciate that they are given responsibilities and feel that their views are always listened to. The school council enables them to be involved in discussing and making recommendations for change in the school. They feel that their confidence to make decisions is actively developed by staff.

- Pupils have opportunities to attend alternative provision during the school day to enhance their experiences and develop specific life and functional skills. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the driving courses they are taking. Experiences of practical skills such as bricklaying and carpentry help inform pupils' decisions about their future destinations after school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Staff, parents and pupils say that behaviour used to be a cause for concern but there has been a complete culture change over the past two years. The number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour has fallen dramatically over this time. Fixed-term exclusions were extremely high in 2015, but there has been only one exclusion since December 2016. Everyone is expected to take responsibility for improving behaviour and challenging poor behaviour.
- Pupils develop excellent social skills, including taking turns when speaking, listening to one another and showing exemplary manners to staff and visitors. Behaviour does not need to be constantly managed by staff, but is shaped by the positive relationships and examples pupils are surrounded by. Pupils' behaviour at times of the day when they are less directly supervised, such as at breaktimes or lunchtime, is always excellent.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and they demonstrate this by wearing their uniform with pride. The school buildings and facilities are treated with respect by all pupils.
- Pupils recognise that there are some rare incidents of bullying, but were certain that these were taken seriously by staff. They were extremely confident that any issues would be dealt with straightaway. There is only one incident of bullying recorded this academic year.
- Where pupils need extra support with their behaviour, the school puts in place plans for positive handling and intervention. These are followed carefully by staff, who have all been trained in de-escalation techniques and positive handling strategies. The number of incidents of physical intervention has reduced to a very few incidents each term.
- The behaviour records show very little evidence of prejudicial or derogatory language being used at any time around school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- In English, mathematics and personal, social, health and citizenship education, the great majority of pupils are making good or better progress from their starting points. This can be seen in their attitudes, behaviour and learning in lessons, work in their books and the school's analysis of assessment information.

- At the end of Year 11, pupils move on to the next stage of their education with a range of qualifications. These are selected from a core offer and a set of options, depending on the pupils' abilities, skills and interests and with the aim of achieving the highest possible outcomes. Pupils achieve GCSEs in English, mathematics and art and design. They gain entry level and level 1 and level 2 qualifications in science, drama, food technology, media studies, life skills, photography, music and sports. Pupils can also work towards a Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme bronze or silver award.
- Pupils are set ambitious targets, based on their prior attainment and information from the school's own baseline assessments. Pupils' progress is tracked and measured against aspirational targets for good or better progress. This ensures that there is no ceiling put on expectations for any pupil's progress.
- Progress since September for all groups is good or better across the curriculum, although more detail is available for core subjects such as English and mathematics than for foundation subjects. This shows a marked improvement compared with previous years and reflects the effort and commitment of the school to raising standards and challenging everyone to raise their game.
- Pupils make impressive progress in developing their skills for life, in sex and relationships education, personal, social, health and economic education, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. This is clearly seen in pupils' work and shows in their attitudes, behaviour and conversations. This is particularly apparent in the impact learning has in removing barriers to learning for some pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties and who face particular challenges.
- Teachers work well with other schools in the multi-academy trust and other special schools to check the accuracy of their assessments.
- The range of qualifications being taken in key stages 4 and 5 has grown hugely in response to the school's recognition of pupils' needs, interests and aspirations. Leaders take imaginative action to locate the most appropriate courses.
- Most-able pupils in key stage 4 are given every opportunity to achieve results in GCSEs and level 2 qualifications so that they can take their place on appropriate courses at college. Support from specialist teachers in the multi-academy trust helps them to realise their potential in English and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those who are looked after, make the same excellent progress from their starting points as their peers in English and mathematics.
- Pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. High-quality careers advice is designed to find the best possible pathway for every pupil. This ensures that all pupils are very clear about the choices available to them and how these choices can help them meet their aspirations. No pupil leaves the school without going on to employment, further training or education. One parent spoke about the positive support their child had received throughout his school career and that he was now 'ready for future life'.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- The sixth form is led knowledgeably and extremely well. Leaders have high expectations for students, who thrive in an environment which encourages them to make positive choices about their future. Monitoring of progress in all subjects is rigorous and reflective, based on a clear understanding of prior attainment. This leads to changes in provision if required. As a result, students make substantial and sustained progress in their core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics.
- The curriculum has been changed to meet the varying needs of students, and as a result of feedback from parents and students. Students follow their own tailored pathways based upon their needs, interests and aspirations, with qualifications drawn from the areas of life skills, employability and further education. All pathways include a strong element of personal, social, health and citizenship education designed to support students in their life after school. All sixth-form students complete their courses.
- Students' behaviour in the sixth form is outstanding. One student spoke to inspectors about how his behaviour was not good when he was in Year 10, but his teacher had helped him 'by being there for me and guiding me'. Students feel that they are treated with respect and are expected to act like adults.
- Students are well prepared for their next steps in learning. They recognise the choices available to them and articulate confidently what they will do after leaving school. One student spoke about going to college to be a mechanic because he likes to fix things, and how he had enjoyed the opportunity to practise mechanics and driving at school. School leaders track students for the six months after they leave school and are confident that they know that students remain in further education, employment or training.
- Students are successfully encouraged to take part in the development of team skills, enterprise, negotiation and planning and how to organise themselves. An example of this was seen where two students responsible for managing the school's café were training other students.
- Progress over time is very strong. It is very accurately tracked against the assessment criteria for externally verified courses. Where students are struggling, interventions are put in place or alternative pathways are considered. Pupils leave school with a range of qualifications which are appropriate to their needs and interests and which support their next stages of learning.
- Students are safe, are taught how to keep themselves safe and feel safe. They contribute very positively to the school community and help each other.
- Attendance in the sixth form is at least as high as for the rest of the school. Students who have come into the sixth form with lower attendance have been encouraged through personal mentoring and the development of personalised pathways. This has resulted in improved attendance for all students.

School details

Unique reference number	141376
Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	10032553

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	150
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body and academy trust
Chair	Mick Chilvers Julie Sullivan
Headteacher	David Lisowski
Telephone number	02476 303776
Website	www.riverbankacademy.org.uk
Email address	headteacher@riverbankacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Riverbank School converted to become an academy on 1 January 2015. When its predecessor school, Alice Stevens School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

- Riverbank School is a special school catering for pupils who have a range of special educational needs. These include moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and speech, language and communication disorders.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are White British, with a number from other ethnic backgrounds.
- Nearly all pupils are placed in the school by Coventry local authority. Currently, there are three pupils who are looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is much larger than the national average.
- Pupils from the school attend two alternative providers, Brakes and Positive Youth Foundation, both in Coventry.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 19 lessons. For most of these, they were accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors selected a sample of pupils' work from all subject areas and year groups for scrutiny.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, newly qualified teachers, learning support assistants, the safeguarding team, the inclusion team, the chair of governors, chair of the board of trustees and the executive principal of the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils from key stages 3 and 4, and with a group of sixth-form students. A learning walk was undertaken with two students from Year 12. Inspectors met with four parents.
- Inspectors considered a range of school documentation, including records of attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, staff development, pupils' and students' progress, teachers' planning and a range of policies and reports on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered seven responses on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 63 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Robert Roalfe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Derek Barnes

Ofsted Inspector

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