

Ripplevale School Rochester

10–13 New Road, Rochester, Kent, Rochester, Kent ME1 1BG

Inspection date

27 September 2023

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1)–(2)(1)(a), 2(2)(e)–2(2)(e)(iii)

- At the last standard inspection, it was found that the school's careers programme was not current or up to date. The inspection also found that leaders had not developed a subject curriculum that identifies and orders the important knowledge that pupils need to learn through, and across, key stages.
- Leaders have recently introduced well-sequenced schemes of work in subjects such as English, history, mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The curriculum in physical education and music is under construction. The curriculum in all subjects reflects the expectations of learning set out in the national curriculum. Older pupils study a range of academic and vocational programmes of study, including functional skills and GCSE qualifications.
- In the school's action plan, which was evaluated by Ofsted in August 2023, leaders indicated that a new careers programme was due to be launched in September 2023 and that a qualified leader had been appointed to oversee this programme. During the inspection, evidence confirmed that an up-to-date careers programme is being implemented this term. Pupils are excited to explore the range of different careers available, based on their ambitions and interests, using the newly introduced careers platform. Leaders are in the process of analysing individual pupil's responses. They intend to use this information to provide bespoke independent careers advice for Year 11 pupils. Leaders intend to make suitable arrangements for external speakers to talk to pupils about colleges, apprenticeships and local employment opportunities.
- Leaders have developed a suitable careers policy which captures their plans for this part of the school's provision. Policy and practice are evolving as they are being put into place.
- The previously un-met standards in this part are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7–7(b), 15, 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- At the previous inspection in April 2023, safeguarding was judged to be effective and all relevant standards relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff were found to be met.
- The safeguarding policy complies with present guidelines and is also published on the website in accordance with part 6 of the independent school standards (the standards). Leaders use regular training and briefings to update staff about safeguarding matters.
- The school's single central record of pre-appointment checks on adults, including agency staff, contains the statutory information required. Key leaders and members of the proprietor body have undertaken safer recruitment training.
- The school uses an online system to record safeguarding concerns. The system enables leaders to track and monitor safeguarding concerns closely. Staff have been trained in its use. This includes refresher training and additional monitoring and guidance for new staff. Leaders are making sure that pertinent information that involves external agencies such as the police is shared promptly with the local authorities who place pupils at the school.
- Leaders understand the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have a secure understanding of potential safeguarding risks at the school. Pupils learn how to stay safe both online and offline.
- Pupils are positive about their school. Those who spoke with the inspector reported that they feel safe and trust staff. Pupils are confident that staff care for them and are always there if they have any worries.
- The school monitors pupils' attendance closely. Staff have received training on which codes to use to ensure that they record pupils' daily attendance accurately.
- A significant minority of pupils do not come to school regularly. Leaders are working with several external agencies to give these pupils the help and support they need to improve their attendance. The school takes appropriate action to initiate welfare checks where it cannot contact any post-16 students who miss school.
- All relevant standards in part 3 continue to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- At the last inspection, leaders had not ensured that all the independent school standards were met. Weaknesses were identified in the school's curriculum design, its careers programme and in leaders' actions to support pupils who do not attend school regularly.
- Since the start of this term, a new headteacher and several senior leaders have joined the school, including teachers with specialist knowledge in subjects such as PSHE and English. Leaders are making in-roads towards fully implementing the school's post-Ofsted action plan, which was submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in August 2023.
- Leaders make sure that staff access relevant external accredited training. This is helping enhance staff's knowledge and expertise in the school's specialism and subject pedagogy. It is also contributing to the development of their leadership skills.
- Leaders recognise that there is some more work to be done to make sure that the school's new careers programme is fully established and effective.

- The newly appointed leadership team and the proprietor body demonstrate the knowledge and capacity to continue driving improvement. However, it is too soon to judge that the requirements of the standards are consistently met. Therefore, part 8 remains un-met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	132097
DfE registration number	887/6006
Inspection number	10310691

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

Type of school	All-through school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	157
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cavendish Education Ltd
Chair	Simon Coles
Headteacher	Natalie Christie
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,450 to £45,000
Telephone number	01634 812 233
Website	www.ripplevaleschool.co.uk
Email address	office@ripplevaleschoolrochester.co.uk
Dates of previous standard inspection	25 to 27 April 2023

Information about this school

- Ripplevale School Rochester is an independent special school that caters for pupils with autism. Many pupils also have additional SEND, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and speech, language and communication difficulties. All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.
- There have been several changes in leadership and staffing since the previous

inspection. The headteacher and most senior leaders had been in post for three weeks at the time of this monitoring inspection.

- The school occupies two different premises, located close to each other on the same road. The 'school' building caters for primary and secondary pupils. The 'college' building caters mainly for post-16 pupils, including those aged 19 to 25.
- The school is governed by a board of directors.
- The school is registered for up to 210 pupils aged between six and 25 years of age.
- The school's last standard inspection was in April 2023.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection. The inspector was also asked to take account of complaints received by the DfE which related to attendance, safeguarding and leadership.
- This was the first progress monitoring inspection since the last standard inspection. It was carried out with no notice.
- The DfE required the school to prepare an action plan as a result of non-compliance with the independent school standards identified at the time of the last standard inspection in April 2023. This was evaluated and accepted by the DfE in August 2023.
- A range of documents and policies linked to the DfE's request were scrutinised before and during the inspection. This included the school's curriculum policy, careers programme policy, schemes of work, attendance and safeguarding policies. The inspector also checked the single central record.
- The inspector met formally with pupils to gather their views of the school and discuss their work. The inspector met with leaders to review the curriculum in history and PSHE. She also carried out lesson visits with the headteacher and a work scrutiny of pupils' books. The inspector held a discussion with a group of staff. She also met with two separate groups of pupils.
- The inspector held a range of meetings. These included with the headteacher and other senior leaders. A meeting was held with the designated safeguarding lead and other safeguarding leaders.
- The inspector met online with two directors of the proprietor body, including the chair. She also spoke with the compliance and the finance directors for Cavendish Education Ltd.

Inspection team

Shazia Akram, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if—
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are—
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that—
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.

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