

The Russett School

Middlehurst Avenue, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3BW

Inspection dates 8–9 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils across the school, with a range of complex special educational needs, make outstanding progress in their academic, personal and social development.
- Those children who enter the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to an excellent start in a well-planned learning environment. They make particularly rapid strides in learning to communicate.
- Students in the sixth form do equally well. They are proud of their achievements and say that the school prepares them very well for their future lives.
- Pupils in the multi-sensory impaired unit make outstanding progress from usually very low starting points. The tiny steps of progress they make represent huge strides for these pupils over time.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Year on year more of the teaching has been at least good, with an increasing amount which is outstanding. Now the majority of teaching is consistently outstanding, although very occasionally reluctant learners are not provided with alternative activities linked to the lesson.
- Pupils say they feel very safe and well-cared for in school and their parents agree with them.
- Pupils develop excellent attitudes to their learning. They want to do well and revel in praise for their hard work and to the reward of trips out of school where they learn to behave extremely well in the community as well as in school.
- Teaching assistants and specialist staff make a huge contribution to pupils' success. They are skilled at developing caring and supportive relationships which give pupils the confidence to try new things.
- The headteacher and senior leaders, including the governing body, have had very clear goals in sight to make sure this is a continually improving school. They make frequent checks on the quality of teaching and learning and ensure that staff have the necessary skills and expertise to meet the differing needs of pupils, resulting in outstanding achievement.
- The governing body has developed excellent links into school to check on the provision at first hand. Together with senior leaders they make sure everything possible is done to enhance the lives and improve the chances of pupils at The Russett School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons or part-lessons taught by 11 teachers. Three of these were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team.
- Many discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, with the family liaison worker, job advisor, higher level teaching assistant, support staff and health professionals.
- A meeting was held with members of the governing body and telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and with the school's external improvement partner.
- A group of pupils came to talk to the lead inspector to express their views about their school and how well they think they are doing and informal discussions were also held with pupils around the school. There were 17 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and inspectors also took into account views expressed in the school's own questionnaires to parents. Additionally, 30 members of staff completed questionnaires.
- Inspectors examined records and examples of pupils' achievements in their pupil progress files. A range of additional documents, including minutes of governing body meetings, teachers' planning and assessment, pupil progress data, school self-evaluation and development planning, safeguarding and behaviour management records were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ashley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Russett is a school for pupils and students who have a range of severe, profound and complex needs, including a large minority with autism spectrum conditions. The school also makes provision across Cheshire and from neighbouring authorities for pupils who have multi-sensory impairments.
- Pupils can be admitted to the school at any time, with a significant proportion of those with autism being admitted at later stages in their schooling, sometimes after periods out of school.
- Nearly all pupils are White British.
- A much higher proportion than average is known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- All Year 7 pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding. (Additional government funding for those pupils entering Year 7 below the attainment level expected for their age in English and mathematics).
- Key Stage 4 and sixth-form students make use of alternative provision, such as Mid Cheshire College, Reaseheath and PettyPool, as well as individual businesses to enable individual students to access vocational courses or attend work experience placements.
- The school provides an outreach service, COaTS (Community, Outreach and Training Service), offering advice and training in the management of disability and special educational needs to pre-school settings, primary and secondary schools and other providers on request.
- During the last year there has been a significant turnover of teaching staff and a restructuring of the senior leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of those pupils who find it difficult to remain in the classroom throughout a session, by providing alternative activities for them which are linked to the learning in the classroom, whenever possible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' achievement, in terms of their academic progress in English and mathematics and in their personal and social development, is outstanding. Nearly all pupils make at least good progress towards challenging targets and a large majority do outstandingly well.
- Children who start in the Early Years Foundation Stage begin to learn to communicate by whatever method suits them best. Consistent routines and skilful staff ensure that children settle and begin to make sense of signs, symbols, objects of reference, photographs and so on, which help them understand the order of the day, so that they begin to join in the excellent range of activities provided.
- Across Key Stages 1 to 4, pupils are supported exceptionally well by sharply-focused targets, excellent lesson-planning and very knowledgeable support assistants. As a result, all groups of pupils make the best possible progress they can. The most-able pupils learn how to write simple sentences and use their counting skills in practical situations. In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were able to show they could subtract from 20, using four different methods to work out their answers and were immediately challenged to try harder numbers.
- Year 7 catch-up funding has provided staff training which, for example, is improving the mathematical skills of sensory learners.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students enjoy a varied curriculum which makes sure they continue to develop their English and mathematical skills, using them for everyday purposes, such as making shopping lists, buying, preparing and cooking food. Courses are focused on helping students develop the life skills they will need in the future. The job co-ordinator prepares students exceptionally well for work experience placements and to attend vocational courses at one of the local colleges, which contributes to their outstanding achievement and provides students with tasters of the courses they might follow when they leave school. Students are proud to gain external awards, which mark their personal and academic achievements at a range of different levels.
- Although progress is usually in very small steps for pupils in the multi-sensory impaired unit, the specialist teaching, curriculum and resources used make sure that it is exceptional. Pupils in this department develop their mobility and communication skills through very consistent approaches and very appropriate highly-structured routines, which help them move as smoothly as possible through the various stages of their school lives.
- The small steps of progress which pupils make across the school are noted and shared in highly-effective class teams and pupils are supported to repeat and reinforce learning to be sure it is secure, before moving on to their next targets.
- Additional funding through the pupil premium is used exceptionally well. Additional support provided for eligible pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, by the very skilled higher level teaching assistant, has resulted in huge gains, especially in their reading skills, so that they are now making faster progress than other pupils.
- The primary sport funding has enabled pupils to access new sports and activities and to participate in inter-school competitions by buying in specialist coaching, which is also helping school staff to develop their own physical education and sporting skills.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The quality of teaching has improved so that over time more and more of the teaching is consistently outstanding, with only a little that is good and none that requires improvement. The headteacher and governors have dealt very quickly with teaching which does not match their very high standards.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have an excellent understanding of the learning needs of the different groups of pupils. They are extremely effective at engaging occasionally reluctant

learners to join in lessons, although sometimes alternative activities, linked to the learning in the classroom, are not always planned for times when they are not able to stay in class.

- Teachers plan work with considerable care, thought and imagination to make sure every pupil builds gradually on what they already know and can do. For some pupils, consolidating skills and maintaining them is paramount. For example, pupils who are very resistant to trying anything new are provided with repeated opportunities to practise handling new objects, until they feel comfortable with them.
- Sensory approaches are used exceptionally well for pupils with multi-sensory impairment and profound and multiple learning difficulties to help them gain an understanding of themselves and the world around them. This approach often works well for the most-able pupils too and in a Key Stage 1 class pupils enjoyed learning the initial sound /p/ while singing a song about it, tasting and smelling pineapple and feeling and handling a tactile letter.
- To serve them well as their futures unfold the most-able pupils are challenged to work as independently as possible. This can sometimes take a while to achieve, as new pupils may bring with them anxieties experienced in other settings. Staff are skilled at building their self-confidence and provide prompts and ask questions exceptionally well to help them move forwards in their learning.
- Teaching of mathematics is often linked to familiar routines and everyday objects, such as counting the number of foods the hungry caterpillar ate on each day of the week.
- Large staff teams are managed extremely well by teachers. Teaching assistants are highly-effective facilitators for learning and make a massive contribution to pupils' progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Many pupils arrive at the school with low self-esteem, but quickly develop outstanding attitudes to their learning. This is because excellent relationships with staff help them to feel safe and secure so that they begin to feel more positive about themselves and what they can do. They build their resilience and find it possible to focus on activities for longer periods of time.
- Pupils say they love school and a parent governor reported that his son is up, dressed and keen to go to school well before time each morning.
- Staff use behaviour management procedures consistently and this helps pupils to be sure what is expected of them. They learn to manage their own behaviour and to ask for help or support when they need it.
- Pupils are proud of their school and their achievements. As they progress through the school they learn to behave responsibly and maturely. The learning and use of good social skills is built into all activities in the school throughout the day. Older students enjoy the responsibility of supporting younger pupils at break times and in collective worship.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. In the school's latest survey a hundred percent of parents said they know their children are safe in school. Whenever parents have concerns, they know that they can ask for support from the class teacher or the family liaison worker and it will be readily provided.
- Pupils are very confident that any bullying incidents will be sorted out by staff, but say that such incidents hardly ever happen. Through the school's excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils learn to be kind and thoughtful and to share and help each other. Staff go to great lengths to help pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and to ask for help if they are unsure about something. As a measure of their commitment to developing pupil awareness of themselves and others, the school has recently achieved the religious education (RE) Quality Mark at the gold standard, the first special school in the country to do so.
- Pupils attend school well because they feel happy and comfortable there. Absences are usually due to chronic ill-health problems or because some pupils attend on a part-time basis initially as they begin to build on their admission into school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since the previous inspection the headteacher, senior leaders and governing body have steadily driven improvement, so that the school is now outstandingly effective. Responses to the staff questionnaire demonstrated a commitment from the whole school to ensuring that every pupil has the best possible opportunity to succeed, living up to their vision to 'enhance the lives of those around us'.
- The leadership structure has been revised to ensure that there is accountability at all levels, including by middle leaders who take responsibility for ensuring that their subjects are delivered exceptionally well. Regular checks on teaching, including those supply teachers who are covering absences, have raised the bar and teachers have responded to the challenge by delivering consistently good and outstanding lessons. They have been supported through a very well-targeted programme of training and development linked to school improvement planning.
- Senior leaders frequently check on pupil progress. Several different assessment sets are used to best demonstrate the progression of different groups of pupils. Swift action is taken to support those few pupils who are in danger of failing to meet their targets.
- Other schools and settings benefit from the skills and expertise at The Russett through the outreach service (COaTS). The family liaison worker links with other providers to support them to develop their own skills in working with children and pupils with special educational needs and to offer training programmes delivered by the school staff and specialist professionals. The service is highly regarded in the county.
- Links with other agencies, including nursing and therapy services, make an extremely strong contribution to meeting pupils' very varied medical, physical, communication and behavioural needs, so that they are ready and able to learn.
- The excellent curriculum is adapted by skilled staff, some of whom have additional specialist training, to be sure it matches the very different needs, interests and stages of the varying groups of pupils.
- The local authority provides only light-touch support for this successful school and is appreciative of the outreach service provided to other schools and settings.
- Excellent communication through home-school books, phone calls, parents' evenings and review meetings make sure that parents feel well-informed about what their children are learning and how well they are progressing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is led by a very experienced Chair. Membership of the governing body is constantly kept under review to ensure that there is a wide range of expertise to support and challenge senior leaders highly effectively.
 - School governors are very knowledgeable about the work of the school at first hand as each governor has a link to a class and its staff team. Additionally the headteacher provides high quality reports which provide governors with a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and data relating to pupil achievement, which they question in depth.
 - Governors ensure that pay progression is linked to high quality performance and to Teachers' Standards. They know just how additional government funding is spent and ensure that it is having the positive impact intended. The members of the curriculum committee have received training about assessment and target-setting by senior leaders and understand the need for different assessment tools to be used.
 - Governors ensure equality of opportunity for all groups and individuals by overseeing their progress and checking on how the budget is shared out. They ensure that their statutory duties are carried out rigorously, with pupil safety and well-being always a first priority.

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	111506
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	439473

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Roberts
Headteacher	Catherine Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	11 April 2011
Telephone number	01606 853005
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	therussetthead@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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