

Two Rivers School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124513
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	296174
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	195
6th form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Newnham
Headteacher	Victoria Vernon
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2000
School address	Solway Close Leyfields Tamworth B79 8EB
Telephone number	01827 475690
Fax number	01827 475697

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors. The report of the federation is published in two forms, one for each establishment URN 124513 and 124522

Description of the school

Two rivers is a large, newly federated special school for pupils with a range of learning difficulties. Most pupils have moderate or severe learning difficulties. A small minority have autistic spectrum disorders or profound and multiple learning difficulties and a few pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties or sensory impairment. Pupils come from a mix of social backgrounds. Almost all pupils are of White British origin. A small but significant number of pupils are looked after by the local authority. Most pupils enter the school during a school year and not at the normal time of admission. The school has been in operation since September 2005 and the secondary department and sixth form are due to move into new premises in 2008. The sixth form only caters for students with severe learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Two Rivers is an outstanding school where all pupils are helped to do their very best academically and personally. The school is alive with happy enthusiastic pupils who are thriving and are proud of the work they are doing. Although standards are well below average due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties, all pupils usually demonstrate outstanding progress and achievement in a very wide range of subjects and courses. In English and mathematics most pupils gain top marks in their entry-level examinations, but up to Year 9 they make good rather than outstanding progress. This is because not all teachers set the aspirational targets needed for them to make the outstanding progress so evident in most subjects. Pupils excel in many areas, especially in the arts where the school is due to take on specialist status. This year pupils won the 'Best Youth Group' award in the Tamworth drama festival. In sports, music and art, awards are abundant, reflecting the very rich, vibrant curriculum. These achievements are as a result of outstanding leadership and excellent teaching and learning. This view is supported by parents, who typically report that 'the staff are making brilliant progress with my child'. Since the school was formed in September 2005 there have been rapid improvements to almost every aspect, despite pupils' achievements already being high when the school opened.

Outstanding care, guidance and support, as well as the excellent curriculum lead to very high quality personal development and well-being of pupils. This is equally true of children in the Nursery and Reception. Recent enhancement to the work of teaching assistants has had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. For example the very high quality nursery and autism provision are managed and taught entirely by teaching assistants to a very high standard.

The headteacher and leadership team have overseen a complex federation process smoothly and with no evident dip in performance because self-evaluation is excellent and action is taken effectively. The school has high quality provision to help pupils keep safe and live healthy lives. Everywhere pupils can be observed taking responsibility for themselves and others, helping without being asked and playing a full part in the development of the new school. There is no question that pupils are prepared exceptionally well for their futures and the number of pupils eventually entering supported and independent living schemes, or employment is exceptional.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is effective and provision is good. Students achieve well and make good progress because teaching is good and where possible, courses are closely matched to students' interests and abilities. For a few students, progress has been slower because the sixth form is adapting to a significant change in student abilities. This means that some courses and some teaching did not fully meet their needs last year, although these weaknesses are being improved. Targets are set to help students achieve well, but these are not of the exceptional quality of the rest of the school. In some subjects such as drama and art sixth form work is outstanding. The growing independence and confidence of sixth formers is excellent and they play a full part in the life of the whole school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that every teacher sets sufficiently challenging individual targets, for pupils up to Year 9, in mathematics and English and in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils demonstrate outstanding progress and achievement in their subjects and courses, despite many pupils joining the school in later years. This is true of pupils of all ages and abilities, although, because of their learning difficulties standards remain well below average. Children in the Foundation Stage also make exceptional progress; many have gained two 'P' levels in the last two terms. In science, art, music, history, geography, drama and physical education, progress and achievement are consistently outstanding throughout the school. In English and mathematics, progress and achievement are good up to Year 9, but pupils achieve exceptionally well in their English and mathematics qualifications. The number and quality of qualifications achieved is outstanding. For example, pupils with the most profound difficulties gain awards in basic skills and show evident progress against their targets. In no subject are progress and achievement less than good overall. Everywhere pupils show exceptional performance, including building a model car and coming second in the national Formula One schools' challenge, against mainstream schools. Their artwork is stunning. The school tracks pupils after they leave and many go on to greater than expected independence in their personal and working lives.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. At every turn, pupils show an appreciation and respect for others and take pride in producing work of the very highest quality. To quote one typical pupil, 'This is a great school, we're like a team.' Their evident enjoyment of school is reflected in good attendance which exceeds the local authority targets and is improving each term. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding despite many having challenging behavioural difficulties. Bullying is rare and swiftly resolved. This is largely due to the successful therapeutic programmes run by the school as well as the interesting and thoroughly engaging activities provided for them throughout the day. There is a sense of purpose amongst pupils, which is particularly evident in the rapid progress that they make towards independence. One parent typically reports of her daughter, 'She has much more confidence and ability than I would ever have imagined.' This is shown in the sense of responsibility pupils take in helping to develop the school and small acts of support and consideration by many pupils, including sixth formers throughout the day. Peer counselling and 'playground buddies' are typical examples of the responsibility pupils take for each other. Pupils and sixth formers are prepared thoroughly for their futures, including some high quality experience of work and enterprise. Pupils are fully aware of how to keep safe and healthy, relishing their fruit during break and taking part in lots of sport.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Typically lessons are very well planned to meet the different needs within each group and pupils know what they are trying to achieve, showing tremendous enthusiasm for reaching their goals. Most teachers use aspirational targets to ensure pupils learn as much as possible. However, targets in English and mathematics for pupils up to year 9, and in the sixth form, do not lead to the outstanding progress seen in many other subjects. The quality of relationships in lessons and skilled management of those with behaviour difficulties lead to excellent behaviour. Lessons are typified by lively and knowledgeable presentations, which keep pupils fascinated and lead to some exceptional enjoyment as well as rapid learning. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution, with their confidence and skill leading to outstanding progress for many pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is exceptional in helping pupils from a wide ability and age range to progress to such a high degree in their personal and academic skills. The quality of provision is equally high for those in the Foundation Stage as it is for those taking entry-level qualifications and supports pupils with different special needs equally well. For example, those with autism have a specialist base which has seen them progress in confidence and learning well beyond expectations. The opportunities for accreditation are excellent for pupils up to Year 11. Every pupil is matched to courses that will help them make the best progress. These include the Youth Award Scheme and GCSEs. In the sixth form all students gain qualifications in the performing arts, many study art, and several take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. The school recognises a need to extend the basic skills qualifications for these students.

It is the richness of the curriculum which is so noticeable, such as the opportunities to play instruments, compete in teams or build model cars. History and geography, for example, provide highly effective and vibrant learning experiences linked to their everyday lives. Excellent links with other organisations support this breadth of experience and pupils run successful enterprises such as a gem bag order, which they regularly fill for a local jeweller. The year is packed with meaningful and worthwhile activities, which extend their all-round skills and independence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has thorough and robust systems to keep pupils safe. Case studies of vulnerable pupils demonstrate the exceptional lengths taken by staff to protect pupils and develop their personal skills. The wide range of high quality therapies and the excellent system for helping pupils develop appropriate behaviour have contributed significantly to the mature, well-rounded and responsible attitudes shown by pupils. Parents are very positive about this support, typically reporting, 'we are absolutely thrilled by the care taken'. Pupils are encouraged to aim high. They each have targets, which they know well and in the majority of lessons this helps them

to make outstanding progress. This progress is tracked and supported regularly. In English and mathematics and in the sixth form, some targets lack the level of challenge necessary for pupils to make consistently outstanding progress as they do in so many other subjects. The work undertaken to help pupils find the best possible opportunities when they leave school is outstanding. For example links with colleges and independent living schemes are very thorough and imaginative in meeting pupils' needs and in leading to increasing independence and confidence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher, senior staff and governors have overseen the federation of two schools and significant building work, whilst raising standards from an already high level. This is a remarkable achievement. They have taken the best from both schools and, in less than two years, have put an exceptional array of improvements into place. The capacity to improve is therefore excellent. Self-evaluation is outstanding and this means that the school knows itself and what needs to be improved very well. These improvements included addressing recent issues in the teaching of English and mathematics, which has led to strong improvements in progress in these subjects this year. There were also issues with the system for monitoring how well pupils achieve in different subjects and groups. The development of a new more efficient programme is already under way. Awards, such as the gold 'Artsmark' and successes in the community, continue to be sought despite the significant time required to oversee the impending move. Very strong links with national organisations, schools, colleges, businesses and the local community are all used to support and develop the very high quality work, equal opportunities and achievement of pupils.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Two Rivers School, Tamworth, B79 8EB

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons.

We found your school to be very successful, well run and caring. It is an outstanding school, just like you told us. It helps all of you to make outstanding progress in your lessons, and in your social and personal skills. Your headteacher and senior staff do an excellent job in seeing that you all do so very well. We would like them to help those of you below Year 9 to make even better progress in English and mathematics and in the sixth form.

You are very responsible, hard-working and superbly behaved. Your teachers and teaching assistants show considerable skill in helping you to do your best and they teach very well indeed. The responsible way you want to do well in lessons is very good and you clearly enjoy coming to school. We think that this, alongside your good skills in reading, writing and mathematics, will stand you in very good stead for your next school and future lives.

We were also pleased to see that you attend school regularly, take plenty of exercise and take such a keen interest in eating healthily. Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of subjects and activities to make learning exciting and help you learn so much. We are very impressed with the awards and competitions that you enter, and send you our congratulations on the recent drama and formula one awards. The school is exceptional in keeping you safe and at helping you to become mature well-rounded and independent people. It also cares for and guides you very well to aim high. We are also impressed with the excellent way you contribute to the school and the local community, especially the mature way that you take responsibility for so many things. We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely Lead inspector