

Rainbow School for Children with Autism

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	212/6405
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134145
Inspection number	348763
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Rainbow School is an independent day special school situated in Earlsfield within the London Borough of Wandsworth, in south west London. It opened in 2000, moved to its current location in 2002 and was registered in 2003. It provides education for up to twenty pupils aged between five and fourteen years. This is a change since the last inspection in 2007, when the age-range was four to eleven years of age. Currently there are eighteen pupils on roll aged between the age of five and eleven of whom three are girls. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs related to autistic spectrum disorder and related communication needs. The pupils are referred and funded by local authorities. The proprietors are the Trustees of the Rainbow Charity for Children with Autism.

The school aims to offer a 'structured programme of intensive intervention' which is supported by the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and in particular Verbal Behaviour (VB), which is a branch of ABA. This focuses primarily on developing functional communication and language acquisition and encompasses social, play and independent skills. Another key aim is to reduce challenging behaviour to allow pupils access to a broad and balanced curriculum and to give pupils the learning skills they need to achieve their academic potential.

Evaluation of the school

Rainbow School is successful in meeting its aims. It provides a good quality of education through a good curriculum with its specialist focus. The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall and the assessment of behaviour is meticulous. Pupils make good progress, particularly in gaining independence and communication skills and in their personal and social development. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their welfare, health and safety are promoted effectively. The school's procedures to safeguard the pupils are good. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and meets all but two of the regulations for registration.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and provides the pupils with a broad range of National Curriculum experiences while retaining a highly appropriate emphasis on communication and social skills. The pupils receive a very effective and structured programme of intensive intervention which is supported by the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis. This focuses primarily on developing effective functional communication and language acquisition while also developing improved social, play and independence skills. In addition, the school uses a wide range of approaches and multi-disciplinary therapists, including occupational and speech and language therapists. The requirements of the pupils' statements of special educational needs are fully met.

The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) supports the aim of promoting the pupils' social skills and independence. Lunchtimes and snack times are well used to promote table manners and choice. The range of extra-curricular activities is limited. Opportunities for inclusion in local schools are provided where it is deemed appropriate. A good range of visits are made to the local community. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has recently been improved with highly relevant software and interactive whiteboards. The school recognises that additional training is required to maximise the impact of this resource on the curriculum. The limitation of space on site occasionally reduces the breadth of the curriculum, for example there are no specialist facilities for secondary science or technology. The school's development plan and the trustees' work to open additional premises next term will reduce these difficulties.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. There are many strengths evident in classrooms, notably the quality of relationships between staff. As a result of training, staff have highly appropriate skills in communicating with pupils, for example using signing, picture exchange (PECS) and language. The strongest teaching is supported by a very good knowledge of the pupils' needs, which is reflected in planning for individual pupils. This personalised learning is effective in meeting the wide range of need in some classes. Teachers hold high expectations and plan opportunities for collaborative working, which is a significant challenge for the pupils. For example, in a phonics lesson, the pupils enjoyed a 'treasure hunt' in a sandbox looking for objects beginning with a particular sound. Occasionally, the quality of learning is impaired due to other pupils moving from one area to another, but sensitive pupil management minimises the adverse effects of the premises.

The pupils make good progress overall. The assessment of progress in the National Curriculum subjects is satisfactory and the school is rightly focused on making better use of assessment information so that it can more clearly show small steps in progress over a number of years. In relation to ABA, the assessment of progress in behaviour and social skills is meticulous and very well used to tailor individual programmes.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as a result of the school's strongly embedded emphasis on personal development. Music plays a large part in the learning process, and it is a delight to see the joy on the pupils' faces when they are involved in singing a welcoming song, or receiving the star of the week award for their best efforts.

The caring ethos of the school contributes to an environment where trust and mutual respect are steadily fostered. Pupils are helped to settle and feel part of their community, and transition and integration between both the classes in the school, and if appropriate to mainstream schools, are well thought through. Preparation for life in society, including assisting with lunch, underpins the work of the school. The pupils show improved attitudes to learning and clearly enjoy much of what they learn. Consequently, both behaviour and attendance are good. In the vast majority of cases, the pupils show an appreciation of the need to move safely around the school, especially where space is limited.

Effective behaviour management supports pupils, helping them towards a growing awareness that their conduct affects others and has direct personal consequences. This development is further supported through an additional social and life skills programme, to enable pupils to be integrated and to contribute to their community. Where appropriate, pupils also play a part in their own annual review. A wide range of visits, including gardening in the local church, or learning about hairdressing, enriches their experiences as well as getting them 'out and about'. Pupils' respect for and tolerance of other cultural traditions is evident in their dealings with adults who either work or visit the school, and their neighbours.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. Policies, including those for child protection, the health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour and safeguarding, are based on recent guidance. They are subject to timely review and revision by the recently-established governing body. Staff responsible for safeguarding and child protection have attended appropriate levels of training. All staff are adequately briefed during induction and refresher training. All staff are trained in first aid and accidents and incidents are properly recorded. The school is in the early stages of researching National Healthy School Status so that it may strengthen its promotion of healthy lifestyles. Occasionally, minor remedial works to the building are delayed due to contractual difficulties. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out for all activities, both on and off site. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to the regulations. Since the last inspection, in order to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Every measure is taken to ensure that the proprietor, trustees, governors, staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. Staffing and recruitment procedures, including the single central register, comply with current legislation.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are suitable to ensure safe and effective learning. Located on the ground floor, the classrooms and other teaching areas are suitable for teaching small groups and individuals. However, there are no suitable facilities for pupils who become ill during the school day. In order to compensate for other site limitations, regular use is made of local parks and schools for recreational play and physical activities, including swimming. The trustees are in the advanced stages of seeking registration for additional premises with specialist accommodation, particularly for secondary-aged pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others meets requirements except for one. The school does not routinely submit annual accounts of income received and expenditure incurred, where pupils are wholly or partly funded by their relevant local authority. There are good links between parents and staff and the school provides parents with good quality written reports on their child's progress.

Through pre-inspection questionnaires and discussion, the overwhelming parental view is extremely positive on all aspects of the school's work. Written comments included, 'I like the behaviour and communication targets that are specific to my child... we've seen lots of gains in our child's social skills.' A small minority expressed concerns about the limitations posed by the premises, the lack of a summer school and the amount of homework provided. The trustees are aware of these matters and have suitable plans to address them. Only one local authority response was received which indicated satisfaction with the work of the school although it did not receive financial information as to how the fees were spent.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy and procedures meet the requirements and are followed rigorously.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- submit an annual account to local authorities, and on request to the Secretary of State, of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each pupil funded by those local authorities (paragraph 6(8)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Improve the use of academic data by establishing a closer link with the wealth of data on pupils' behaviour.
- Extend staff expertise in the use of interactive whiteboards and newly acquired computer programs to support language.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Rainbow School for Children with Autism		
DCSF number	212/6405		
Unique reference number (URN)	134145		
Type of school	Special day		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2000		
Age range of pupils	5–14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 15	Girls: 3	Total: 18
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 15	Girls: 3	Total: 18
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,751		
Address of school	520 Garratt Lane Summerstown London SW17 0NY		
Telephone number	020 8879 7700		
Fax number	020 8947 5300		
Email address	sallypalmer@rainbowcharity.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Palmer		
Proprietor	The Trustees of the Rainbow Charity		
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell		
Dates of inspection	6–7 May 2010		