

Inspection of City of Rochester School

Bradbury House, View Road, Cliffe Woods, Rochester, Kent ME3 8UJ

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 July 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils like school. For some, attending this school has been the first time they can say this.

Pupils whose needs make school a challenging place to be are afforded patience, assistance and space to learn. Adults care deeply about pupils who, in turn, feel confident that there is always someone to go to for help.

This school understands and supports pupils' personal, social, emotional and mental health needs well. It also has high aspirations for pupils academically. The school puts pupils on carefully constructed pathways towards finding and fulfilling future goals and ambitions.

This is a vibrant and active school. Pupils benefit from a rich range of opportunities from horse-riding to robotics and from farming to filmmaking. Targeted links with a wide range of off-site partners introduce pupils to a wealth of experiences, as well as chances to gain accreditations that they could not otherwise get in school.

Pupils feel safe and free from bullying. Most behave well. They respond positively to the school's many helpful strategies aimed at minimising times when pupils struggle to regulate their own conduct and helping them get back on track when this occurs.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

New leaders have brought about substantial improvements in a relatively short period. Leaders are uncompromising in putting pupils first but rightly mindful of staff's workload and well-being. Morale is high. Staff believe in what leaders want to achieve.

Together, this unified team of leaders and staff has transformed the school while simultaneously facing the challenges of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Leaders aim to ensure that pupils leave with the qualifications and personal skills to lead fulfilling lives. Central to this intent, is that pupils understand their own difficulties and barriers and can overcome them. There is a strong focus on future employability.

The school's curriculum is tailored according to pupils' needs. The outcomes from pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plan) link closely to their individual programmes. Pupils recall and build on their previous learning in different subjects and take obvious pride in their work.

The school's use of alternative provision is exemplary. This provision is used for specific purposes in a precise and targeted way. Typically, this includes a dual focus on pupils' personal and academic development. Chosen provisions offer accreditations the school could otherwise not provide. For some older pupils, this

potentially opens doors towards future apprenticeships. One pupil benefitting from such provision commented, 'This is my dream.' Leaders' quality assurance of placements is rigorous and rightly praised by the leaders of the provisions themselves.

In school, teachers keep activities short and sharply focused, as needed for many pupils. Teachers' demonstrations are mostly clear. However, some teachers have a tendency to rush explanations. This means important learning points can be obscured. Some do not question pupils well enough to prompt them to recall prior learning for themselves. Initially, training for staff rightly prioritised aspects of safeguarding and well-being which were previously weak. More recently, the emphasis on educationally focused training has increased.

The school attaches rightful priority to teaching pupils to read. The teaching and learning of phonics match pupils' individual stages well. Teachers assess carefully where pupils are up to and give them the right books and resources to go further. Younger pupils display positive attitudes to learning to read. Some older pupils embrace opportunities to bring books they read to life through character voices or in drama or roleplay.

The school's 'experiential learning' curriculum is a notable strength thanks to its rigorous design. The access pupils have to a rich range of experiences is systematically and coherently planned. The intended learning is precisely defined and assessed. As well as being of value in its own right, this approach has helped to re-engage previously disaffected pupils and move them back towards formal qualifications.

The promotion of pupils' personal development is deeply embedded throughout the school's work. Pupils are taught directly about how to recognise and try to manage their own emotions. The school's cultural and diversity awareness calendar marks diverse events from 'Holocaust Memorial Day' to 'Acts of Kindness Day'.

Staff employ helpful strategies to support pupils' behaviour in lessons. During breaktimes, pupils' individual needs are respected and those that need their own peace and space are afforded it.

Many parents and carers are understandably grateful for what the school does for them and their children. There are numerous examples where the school goes above and beyond to support families in the best interests of pupils. Leaders work extensively with parents where pupils' attendance is a concern.

Like school leaders, trustees are passionate advocates for children and young people with special education needs and/or disabilities. Trustees bring specialist knowledge, are professionally curious and fulfil a suitable 'critical friend' role. There are clear systems and structures in place to ensure that, as a minimum, the school is compliant with statutory requirements. The school's well-conceived safeguarding policy is available on its website. An incredibly detailed accessibility audit and resulting plan reflects the high priority this school places on inclusion for all.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding has a high priority. Staff know their responsibilities and follow the school's processes well.

Pupils feel safe. They unanimously agree that there are adults they can go to in school if worried.

Safeguarding and other records of matters that might affect pupils' welfare or well-being are thorough, well organised and diligently classified. This enables leaders to navigate records confidently and quickly to get to the most important points, take the necessary action and follow this up as appropriate.

Leaders' approach to checking the suitability of adults is thorough. They scrutinise application forms and dates, querying any inconsistencies between documents.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have established strong foundations, but they know there is more to do to ensure that the curriculum fully affords every pupil opportunity to excel. While most pupils attend and engage well, a few do not. This is in spite of the significant time and efforts of leaders and staff working with families. Leaders should further implement their ongoing plans so that their vision of a highly refined curriculum that fully meets all pupils' needs is realised and contributes to consistently high achievement.
- In order to rapidly improve from a low base, new leaders understandably initially prioritised safeguarding training and other aspects of well-being and mental health. The focus on education training has already increased and been sufficient to secure the rapid improvements seen. However, staff are not consistently adept in areas such as emphasising and explaining key learning points, asking questions or ensuring pupils remember and recall key content. Leaders should further expand the professional development offer and support for staff to ensure that high-quality curriculum implementation is embedded consistently across the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	145231
DfE registration number	887/6011
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10193098
Type of school	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Magic (UK) Ltd
Chair	Claire Cooper
Headteacher	Alicja Emmett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,884 to £89,220
Telephone number	01634 570706
Website	www.cityofrochesterschool.org
Email address	schoolcontact@cityofrochesterschool.org
Date of previous inspection	27 to 29 November 2018

Information about this school

- This school provides education for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Many pupils have associated needs and/or conditions. All pupils have an EHC plan and are placed by either Kent or Medway local authorities.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 27 to 29 November 2018. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection was conducted on 24 September 2019.
- The school currently uses four alternative providers. One of these is registered, three are not.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other leaders, staff and pupils. He held a meeting with three trustees, including the chair.
- To understand the quality of education provided by the school, the inspector looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). He did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHE and design and technology. To explore each subject, the inspector spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils and examined curriculum plans for the subject. He also looked at pupils' work. The inspector visited lessons in these subjects.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed by 16 pupils, 16 parents and 40 staff through Ofsted's online questionnaires.
- To sample the school's use of alternative provision, the inspector visited Squirrel's Riding School, Chatham, and spoke with the manager, staff and pupils. He also had a remote conversation with the proprietor of White Rocks Farm, Sevenoaks, and spoke with pupils who attend, or have attended, this provision.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils, examining policies, processes and written records. Safeguarding was a theme of discussions with a wide variety of people throughout the inspection.

- Through all activities, the inspector considered evidence about the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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