

Inspection of City of Rochester School

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

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 July 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe and secure at school. They know that staff are on their side and will support them kindly and sensitively. The school is highly successful at integrating pupils, not only back into education, but into the school community. Many pupils had a negative view of education prior to joining City of Rochester School. They speak very positively about their school, and how it has supported them to develop an optimistic view of education. Over time, pupils learn to value themselves and others. Older pupils and students in the sixth form say that the school has transformed their lives.

The school has designed its educational offer very carefully to ensure that pupils achieve well academically and incorporate experiential and vocational learning that feels relevant and engaging to pupils. The school's strong curriculum offer supports work to improve pupils' attendance, many of whom have in the past been reluctant to attend school. Pupils told inspectors that they now want to come to school. Pupils benefit from the positive and respectful environment that staff create. Pupils learn to behave well and to be respectful of others.

At all times, the school is alert to what captures an individual pupil's attention and interest. The school uses a range of specialist providers to enable pupils to pursue these. For some older students, this support and provision has been a stepping stone to a positive next step. For example, several pupils have had riding lessons and undertaken qualifications in horse knowledge and care before successfully moving on to an apprenticeship in a riding stable.

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

Leaders are passionate about providing all pupils with a high-quality and meaningful education, within a supportive and nurturing environment. The school has developed a broad curriculum that enables pupils to make connections with the world and understand how they can play a positive role in society now and in the future.

Teachers and the school's therapy team work together carefully to ensure that pupils are able to develop their well-being and mental health, as well as their communication and interaction and physical strength and coordination to succeed in education and beyond. Pupils learn to understand their own needs and to self-regulate with independence and confidence. Pupils who have attended the school for longer are highly reflective about their journey with the school and the highly positive impact that the school has had for them.

In the strongest subjects, the school has developed clear and well-sequenced curriculums that link carefully between the primary, secondary and sixth-form phases of the school. In these subjects, teachers have strong subject knowledge and explain key learning clearly. Learning in these subjects deliberately builds on what came before and enables pupils to build their knowledge and understanding in manageable steps.

In some subjects, there is less clarity about how learning will build over time. Teachers sometimes introduce complex tasks to pupils without ensuring that pupils have the knowledge and understanding required to be successful. This leads to pupils becoming overly reliant on adults and feeling unable to tackle learning with confidence.

The school prioritises reading. The English curriculum is underpinned by a range of high-quality texts. Pupils enjoy discovering books. They like the way that staff bring them to life and help pupils understand the themes and subtleties within stories and poems. The school ensures that pupils have access to a wide range of books that link to pupils' interests.

Most pupils at the school can read well enough to access the school's full curriculum. The school carries out a range of assessments to identify which pupils need more support to learn to read. However, assessments do not consistently identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading. As a result, the support that pupils at an earlier stage of learning to read receive is not consistently aligned with their needs. The school has trained staff to teach early reading, but this training has not had the impact leaders want. As a result, not all pupils make as much progress in learning to read as they could. Further training in teaching reading is planned for staff in August 2024.

The school puts pupils' personal development at the heart of its work. The planned curriculum is carefully supported by a programme of trips and visits that enrich pupils' education and help to build their understanding of the world. The school has continued to develop their careers programme since the last inspection. All pupils receive individual and impartial careers guidance. Pupils learn about a wide range of possible careers and next steps, and most feel very well equipped for life beyond City of Rochester School.

Since the last inspection, the school has opened an additional site that houses its expanding sixth form and vocational offer. This allows pupils to learn car and bike mechanics, woodwork and hair and beauty as part of their overall educational programme. Older pupils and students in the sixth form value these opportunities and ways in which they enable them to apply their learning in a practical context. For example, pupils have recently made bird boxes using their woodwork and mathematical knowledge and understanding. These boxes were made as part of a wider project with a local environmental charity. The school has an active school council that works hard to represent the views of its peers. The school council leads a range of projects to support local charities and to fundraise for important charitable causes.

Upon joining the school, pupils quickly realise that leaders and school staff will work with them to overcome any barriers to accessing education that may previously have held pupils back. As a result, pupils actively opt back into education. They work hard to meet the school's high expectations for their behaviour and conduct and to achieve well in their learning. Pupils are kind and respectful to each other and want

to give back to the school community. Older pupils take great pride in taking on peer mentoring roles to support pupils who have joined the school more recently. When pupils are not attending as well as they might, the school takes every possible action to support that pupil and their family.

Leaders, and those responsible for governance, have a very clear vision of the education they want to provide for all pupils. They ensure that teaching staff are clear about how to support pupils with autism effectively so that they feel safe and secure at school and are able to learn effectively. Teachers feel very well supported by leaders in their roles. The proprietor body works closely with leaders to ensure that the independent school standards are consistently and securely met. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Assessment information is not used consistently well to inform the teaching of reading. Additionally, not all staff are experts in the teaching of early reading. The school should develop their assessment approaches in reading so that all staff have an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points and gaps and have the expertise they need to support all pupils reading effectively.
- Teachers do not always consider the prior knowledge pupils will need to successfully develop new learning. As a result, pupils struggle to access some learning. The school should revisit and refine curriculum sequencing so that learning builds carefully over time and ensure that teachers understand how to break learning down into manageable steps for pupils.

How can I feed back my views?

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

School details

Unique reference number	145231
DfE registration number	887/6011
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10322071
Type of school	Special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Proprietor	Magic (UK) Ltd
Chair	Kirstine Boon
Headteacher	Alicja Emmett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,884 to £89,220
Telephone number	01634 570706
Website	www.cityofrochesterschool.org
Email address	office@medway-magic.org
Dates of previous inspection	6 to 8 July 2021

Information about this school

- A new chair of the proprietor board was appointed in September 2023.
- This school provides education for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism. Many pupils have additional diagnoses, associated needs and/or conditions. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and are placed by their local authority.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 6 to 8 July 2021.
- The school does not use any alternative provisions. The school uses a range of specialist provisions to supplement the education of a number of pupils. School staff are consistently in attendance when pupils learn with other provisions.
- The school has acquired a new site since the last inspection. The school's sixth form and vocational learning provision are situated at this new site. The new site is located at Unit 12, Henley Business Park, Trident Close, Rochester, ME2 4FR.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the wider senior leadership team and the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and performing arts. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects and reviewed schemes of work for some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety).

Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school's website.

The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The school has requested to increase the maximum number of pupils from 60 to 85. The school is well equipped to manage this increase to pupil numbers. School leaders, and those responsible for governance, have developed a phased plan to increase numbers over the next five years.
- The school has carefully considered the additional staffing needed for this expansion. The school has already increased the capacity of the inclusion team. Additional new staff, including a dedicated careers adviser, have been appointed for September 2024 in readiness for the planned increase in pupil numbers.
- The school is now split across two sites, with older pupils and students in the sixth form based at the school's spacious and well-equipped vocational site.
- The school's two sites provide ample space to accommodate the 85 pupils proposed.

Information about the material change inspection

- The lead inspector considered the implications of the proposed increase in pupil numbers when looking at evidence relating to the school's compliance with the independent school standards. This included considering whether arrangements for safeguarding, health and safety and supervision (part 3), suitability of staff (part 8), accommodation (part 5) and leadership and management (part 8) would remain fit for purpose if the material change request is granted. The lead inspector also confirmed that the school's safeguarding policy was published on the school's website as required (part 6).

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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