

Inspection of Riverwalk School

Mayfield Road, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 2PD

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Lukasz Rumanowski. This school is part of the Consortium Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Andrew Alders-Dunthorne, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Steve Martin.

What is it like to attend this school?

Riverwalk is a happy school. Pupils with complex needs receive skilful support. The safe culture helps them settle well.

Throughout the school, the clear, consistent structure supports pupils to behave well. They enjoy their friendships with peers. Pupils are friendly and polite, saying 'Hi' and holding doors open for adults. Children in the early years respond well to repeated routines. Sensory activities, such as massage and tai chi, mean pupils are ready to focus on learning. Pupils who need it get help with eating and hygiene. Those who can use the play equipment without support. Pupils build their independence and resilience.

Pupils learn what they need to be ready for life beyond school. For instance, they develop life skills, such as cooking, and spending money in the local café. Expectations for learning through the curriculum have risen.

There are plentiful opportunities for enrichment. Pupils learn to swim and cycle. Some with profound and multiple needs take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. There are regular sports days and lots of fun. Pupils enjoy parties, including wheelchair dancing. At the Riverfest Fete, they delight in 'teacher-splating'. Assemblies acclimatise pupils to stimulating situations. These activities help them develop their communication and social confidence.

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

The school has been through a period of changes in leadership. This has included joining a new trust. When Ofsted visited in June 2023, the school was in decline. The school and the trust have acted with urgency to reverse this. They have implemented a clear vision for high-quality education. While this is the case, the pace of change has been steep. This has not been communicated and managed as effectively as it might have been. Staff are proud to work in the school. However, some are unsettled, and do not buy into the school's vision as much as it wants.

The school has reviewed its curriculum. It has put in place one that identifies much more comprehensively the knowledge that pupils should learn. This links well to the previous curriculum, but some aspects of the curriculum are still new. In most cases pupils are developing knowledge well. For example, in physical education (PE), regular 'rebound therapy' on the trampoline develops pupils' core strength. This includes those otherwise in wheelchairs. Through this, pupils improve their balance and movement skills. This learning starts in early years and builds all the way through to the sixth form. That said, in a few areas the curriculum is less clear on what subject-specific knowledge teachers should assess. Where this is the case, teachers do not always adapt the curriculum successfully enough to build precisely on pupils' prior knowledge. Where this happens, pupils do not make the progress they could.

Staff teach the curriculum effectively. Teachers use activities that help pupils remember and apply their learning. Pupils who are non-verbal learn signs through well-planned repetition of musical and movement activities. They then use this knowledge to communicate their needs and understanding. Teachers work seamlessly with teaching assistants and health professionals to ensure pupils can access the learning. For instance, speech and language therapy ensures pupils have the tools they need, such as picture cards and voice pads. As a result, pupils build up their communication and language successfully.

The school provides strong support for pupils' individual needs. It reviews the outcomes from education, health and care (EHC) plans regularly. Staff are adept in breaking down these outcomes into small steps. They plan as a team how to adapt learning in the classroom so that pupils understand and use it. Therefore, pupils do well.

The reading curriculum has improved. The phonics scheme is suitable for pupils' needs. Staff teach this well. Pupils develop their ability and enjoyment in reading. Those not yet ready for phonics learn to discriminate sounds. Pupils like and gain pleasure from books. Those who cannot read gain considerable pleasure from being read to.

There are high expectations of children in the early years. Adults frequently exploit opportunities to develop children's language. Staff are alert to and act swiftly upon any signs of worry, such as changes in behaviour or eating. As a result, children flourish.

The sixth-form curriculum is well considered. Those who stay post-16 particularly require the high levels of bespoke support. Students learn what they need for adulthood.

The school teaches pupils the small steps of how to behave. For example, they learn to manage their emotions. If pupils become heightened, staff help them re-engage. Actions to address any absence are speedy and supportive, such as working closely with families. Therefore, pupils conduct themselves well and attend regularly.

The curriculum supports personal development well. Pupils learn helpful content, such as effective careers education. They develop their understanding of the world outside school, for example learning about people from a range of different cultures. This also builds pupils' respect and tolerance.

The trust has given swift and effective operational support. However, some governance structures have been established recently and are not yet contributing effectively to oversight of the school. The localities committee is new and does not provide the trust board with a detailed, local picture of the school. Consequently, the board's scrutiny is not yet as rigorous as it could be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas, the school does not identify closely enough the subject-specific knowledge that should be assessed. This hampers teachers' ability to adapt and improve the curriculum for pupils. The school should make sure it identifies specifically what knowledge needs to be assessed in all areas of the curriculum, so that pupils' learning builds on a more secure foundation and they make stronger progress.
- The trust and leaders have not managed and communicated the reasons for change as successfully as they intend. This means that some staff do not support fully the changes that are being introduced to the school or understand the rationale for some changes. The school needs to communicate and work with staff in a way that means they understand and support the changes that it is making.
- Some governance systems are not effective enough. In particular, the localities committee is not yet working well to give the trust board the depth of information it needs. This hampers the quality of oversight. The trust needs to ensure that the structures of governance are effective so the board can support and challenge the school successfully.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at

any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146418
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10323787
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Steve Martin
CEO of trust	Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne
Headteacher	Lukasz Rumanowski
Website	www.riverwalk.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Consortium Trust on 1 September 2023.
- The headteacher was appointed on 1 September 2023. The whole senior leadership team has been appointed since then. This includes the designated safeguarding leader.
- The school provides places for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), autistic spectrum disorder and severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- All places are commissioned by Suffolk local authority.

- It is an all-through school. This means it is registered to take pupils from the ages of four to nineteen.
- The school has an off-site base, providing part of the early years and key stage 1 provision, at Sextons Manor Primary School, Greene Road, Bury St. Edmunds IP33 3HG. This provides places for 10 pupils.
- The sixth form is named Riverwalk College. This is on the main school site. This provides full-time provision for students with PMLD.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. The school adjusts how it fulfils this according to the needs of pupils.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other school leaders, staff, and pupils. As part of evaluating governance and the support from the trust, the lead inspector met with a member of the localities committee and a trustee, and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: 'communication and social interaction', including English and early reading; 'investigation and challenge', including mathematics and science; 'physical and sensory development', including PE; and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, met with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- As part of evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders, governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. They considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, and minutes of trust committee meetings.

- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text comments submitted. They considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. Inspectors held conversations with pupils to gauge their views.

Inspection team

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