



Report summary for parents and carers on Western Learning Federation Riverbank Special School

Date of inspection: November 2022

by Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Overview

Riverbank School is one of three special schools that form the Western Learning Federation. The federation was established in January 2018. The aim of the federation is to achieve economies of scale, develop close collaborative working across the schools for the benefit of both pupils and staff, and develop and improve leadership capacity, whilst maintaining the individual identity of each of the three schools.

All three schools are served by one governing body and led by an executive headteacher, who was appointed in 2019.

Riverbank School is a caring and nurturing community that provides valuable care, support and guidance for its pupils. Staff place pupils' well-being at the heart of all aspects of their work.

Most pupils make suitable progress from the initial starting points during their time at the school. Pupils develop their social skills successfully as well as important skills for life. They become confident learners and are developing appropriate communication skills as they progress through the school.

There is a strong culture placed on school values, which pupils demonstrate daily, such as kindness to others. Pupils actively take part in decision-making at the school, which is carefully managed by staff who provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in a range of decisions whilst recognising pupils' varied needs and abilities.

The curriculum is pupil centred, broad and balanced. Curriculum experiences are tailored to meet the needs of pupils effectively. The range of outdoor provision allows pupils to experience learning through a range of creative environments. This supports pupils well to develop a range of skills, particularly their social skills.

The nurturing and caring community of the school strongly supports pupils' well-being, allowing pupils' social and emotional needs to be met effectively. Family and community engagement is strong and well supported by the family liaison officer.

Leadership across the school is effective. Leaders demonstrate a high commitment to improvement across the school and federation. Partnership working successfully contributes to supporting pupils and families across the school.



Recommendations

- R1 Develop a systematic approach to develop pupils' reading skills**
- R2 Strengthen the use of total communication approaches to ensure that these meet pupils' preferred means of communication consistently**
- R3 Ensure that the internal learning environment meets the needs of all learners, particularly those with more complex and sensory needs**
- R4 Evaluate the impact of the Western Learning Federation on Riverbank School**

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the work of the family liaison officer, particularly on their work to support parents and carers around addressing the poverty agenda and the school's use of outdoor learning to meet the needs of pupils with complex and sensory needs, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

School context

Name of provider	Western Learning Federation Riverbank Special School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Special
Number of pupils on roll	71
Pupils of statutory school age	69
Number in nursery classes	0
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in maintained special schools is 44.7%)	61.3%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in maintained special schools is 100%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	39%
Date of headteacher appointment	09/01/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/01/2016
Start date of inspection	21/11/2022
<p>Riverbank School provides day education for pupils from 3 to 11 years old. There are currently 71 pupils on the roll of the school. The additional learning needs of pupils are varied. Most pupils have a statement of special educational need. Just under half of pupils have speech, communication and language difficulties and a further quarter have autistic spectrum condition (ASC). Just under two fifths of pupils have severe learning difficulties. Fourteen per cent of pupils have a general learning difficulty and and/or physical and medical needs.</p> <p>A minority of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The majority of pupils are eligible for free school meals.</p>	

The school has been working with a local university to host PGCE students and is involved in a pilot PGCE programme for student teachers wishing to pursue a career in additional learning needs.

There are eight classes at the school, and 10 full time equivalent teachers and 25 teaching assistants.

The school was last inspected in 2015 and was placed in Estyn monitoring. It was removed from that category in 2017. The head of school was appointed in September 2019 but had been acting headteacher immediately following the inspection.

Riverbank School is due to move to new purpose build accommodation on the Fairwater education campus in 2026.

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