

Riverside Education

Address: 2 Riverside Drive, Stechford, Birmingham, West Midlands, B33 9BF

Unique reference number (URN): 142338

Inspection report: 30 June 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

The personal development programme is a significant strength of the school and reflects leaders' deep moral commitment to giving every pupil a voice. The personal, social, health and relationships education curriculum is designed with care and delivered with expertise. This ensures lessons remain appropriate, sensitive and firmly attuned to pupils' developmental needs. Staff are well trained to address questions pupils may have. They provide individually tailored support that is highly suitable for all pupils' needs.

Safety education is explicit and well embedded. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online and how to be safe when out in the community. Healthy lifestyles and mental health are promoted through cooking, art and emotional resilience activities. Fundamental British values, protected characteristics and kindness are woven through the curriculum, helping pupils understand themselves as local, national and global citizens.

A thoughtful and extensive careers programme opens pupils' eyes to the world of work and suitable, interesting, career options. Leaders encourage pupils to identify and plan the pathways they could follow towards their chosen careers. This enables pupils to focus on exactly what they need to learn to achieve success in their life beyond school. Across all three sites, especially sites 2 and 3, pupils develop effective 'hands on' practical skills in, for example, carpentry and cookery. Furthermore, where pupils confidently look after the animals on the farm and carry out important tasks such as animal care, they show positive character traits such as caring for others, resilience, independence and confidence. These skills support pupils' careers ambitions when they leave school.

Opportunities for wider personal development are rich, ambitious and inclusive. Lunchtimes, across all three sites, are shaped by pupil requests including sports, arts and therapeutic activities. Music and performing are offered for pupils who show an interest in these skills. Educational visits are carefully managed so every pupil can participate meaningfully. Leaders are also acutely aware of ensuring strong transitions, when pupils move on to their next stage of education, support and training after school. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for this change.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils often arrive at the school with much lower starting points than expected for their age. This is, in part, due to their special educational needs and/or disabilities but also because of the disrupted education they have previously experienced. The school's work to develop positive relationships, increase pupils' self-esteem and support pupils' re-engagement with learning is successful.

Pupils achieve qualifications that are appropriately matched to what they need in the future. Consequently, they are prepared well for the next stages of their education, training or

employment. For many, they successfully progress to college courses or supported internships.

Pupils develop a secure knowledge in core and wider curriculum subjects during their time here. For example, they understand key mathematical knowledge around fractions and decimals. They also understand practical skills such as designing and building in carpentry. Generally, pupils produce work that is of a good quality across a range of curriculum subjects. Further work to embed pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, across all curriculum subjects, continues to be developed by leaders.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is prioritised and is a constant focus for the school. Some pupils do not attend as well as they might because of their previous educational experiences. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to attend as much as possible. They carefully consider pupils' barriers to learning and wellbeing, putting in place extensive support to bring about positive change in pupils' attendance. Leaders are particularly alert to pupils whose attendance is too low. Well-thought-through systems mean that leaders regularly discuss each pupil's attendance and the actions they are taking to improve it further. The school's analysis of attendance shows that many pupils attend school more regularly over time but, maintaining regular attendance consistently across all three sites, is an area that leaders continue to focus on.

Behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils learn together calmly and purposefully. Predictable routines and trusted relationships support pupils to find ways to handle their emotions appropriately. Staff understand pupils' needs well and take sensible steps to support pupils when they need additional help to manage their emotions. Similarly, social times are well organised. Pupils socialise with each other or get involved in activities the staff organise for them well. Pupils' attitudes to school and learning are generally positive. Instances of bullying or incidents of a discriminatory nature are dealt with swiftly.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school's curriculum is broad and highly ambitious. It focuses on supporting pupils to re-engage in learning well and equipping them with the key knowledge and skills they need. The curriculum also develops depending on the subjects and interests of each pupil. For example, courses in A-level psychology have run successfully and leaders have created courses in physical education and business studies recently. The curriculum sets out the small steps pupils must take to make progress. Typically, staff are suitably skilled to teach the curriculum effectively. They receive helpful training that means that they are becoming more confident in what they teach. They carefully consider pupils' starting points to shape adaptations so they are well matched to pupils' needs. However, some staff do not always check pupils' understanding effectively nor provide clear and precise feedback to enable pupils to develop their learning more deeply.

Staff prioritise reading, writing and mathematics, helping pupils to fill the gaps many of them have in learning. Pupils receive targeted support that means they catch up quickly. However, leaders know there is more time needed to develop an embedded culture of reading across

the school. Further work to deepen pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is beginning to show positive impact on pupils' abilities but is not yet established fully.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Pupils feel valued, understood and accepted across all three sites. For some pupils, it is the first time they have felt successful, often following periods of disrupted education over several years. Staff take great care to get to know pupils. They carefully check what pupils already know and can do and where gaps in learning exist. Leaders understand the different groups of pupils they work with, pinpointing pupils' specific barriers. They use this information to organise appropriate support, which they provide through a wide range of individual strategies. For example, some pupils benefit from overlays, ear defenders and movement breaks. Pupils' growing confidence in speaking, learning and engaging with each other, socially, is a strength of the school. This leads to a positive culture of belonging for all.

Additional funding for pupils who are disadvantaged is spent effectively and informed by educational research. This has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes from their starting points. It also strengthens their experiences as they develop as young people. Staff are determined that every child can and will succeed. This is reflected in generally effective teaching, especially in mathematics. Training for staff is thoughtfully matched to the school's inclusion priorities. This ensures that, typically, staff have the knowledge and skills needed to tailor learning to pupils' needs.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders, and staff, care deeply about their pupils and want every pupil to succeed. They are ambitious for them and committed to giving each pupil a fresh start. While many pupils arrive after a disrupted education, leaders and staff are successful at helping them re-engage and feel positive about learning again. Leaders have a clear picture of the school. Leaders know what is working well and what still needs to improve. For example, they know that there is more to do to further strengthen and embed literacy and numeracy in the school.

Leaders make sure staff receive regular training so that they can keep building their knowledge, skills and confidence. Staff speak very positively about the school's work and are fully committed to it. They are proud to be part of this school. Leaders take staff wellbeing seriously. They understand the pressures staff face and make sure workload is manageable.

The two co-proprietors, supported by 'school improvement partners', have established a strong, values driven culture in which pupils' developmental stages, communication needs and emotional well-being shape every aspect of the school's provision. Onsite leaders ensure this is enacted as expected. This is done through high levels of visibility, support and modelling of positive approaches by leaders. This creates a culture where staff feel trusted, guided and well equipped to meet pupils' complex needs. All leaders and staff work as one team, across three sites, to ensure the school consistently meets the independent school

standards. Parents speak highly of the school's work and recognise the difference it makes to their children.

Post-16 provision

Expected standard 

Students in post-16 learn and socialise with all other pupils in the school. The curriculum and ambitious expectations for students to achieve well is evident across all three sites. The whole-school curriculum is the same for post-16 students as it is for all pupils. It builds sequentially so that students in post-16, starting at the school from any stage of learning, can progress over time.

As reported within 'curriculum and teaching', typically, staff are suitably skilled to teach the curriculum effectively. They carefully consider students' starting points to shape adaptations, so they are well matched to pupils' needs. However, some staff do not always check students' understanding effectively nor provide clear and precise feedback to enable students to develop their learning more deeply.

Students have regular opportunities to support younger pupils in their roles as peer mentors and, within the site 3 setting, students actively lead on animal care and supporting newer pupils to the Farm environment. This further enables students to develop empathy and resilience with younger pupils. Students improve their social and communication skills successfully through interactions with pupils and staff. This enables them to move to positive destinations successfully. A notable number of students progress to further education and skills providers, including to study college and apprenticeship qualifications.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

School days begin with the calm, predictability and care that the pupils at Riverside need. The school has rightly prioritised the importance of building positive relationships with pupils once they arrive. This helps pupils to build a sense of safety and trust in their new school. Most pupils attend school well. They are warmly greeted on arrival and swiftly move to their classrooms, where their routine continues. Classrooms are well prepared so that pupils can transition smoothly into meaningful activities tailored to their individual needs and interests. Staff manage behaviour well and assist pupils in identifying and controlling their emotions. Bullying is not tolerated. Pupils feel safe in school and are proud of what they achieve.

Pupils talk about previous experiences in education where their needs were not met effectively and, as a result, some pupils faced being bullied, overwhelmed in school and not wanting to attend. Pupils and parents say this school has helped pupils to overcome these barriers and to learn. One parent, typical of others, said: 'Riverside has given my child their life back.'

Learning is typically delivered well. The curriculum is clearly thought out and matched to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lessons are designed to capture pupils' interests and develop understanding. Pupils develop their skills in practical subjects. For example, they learn to use professional equipment to prepare food, to lay bricks and to dig roads. This prepares them well for independence and employment.

Leaders have ensured the personal development programme is carefully designed and responsive to meet pupils' individual needs. Safety education is explicit, systematic and woven into routines. For example, pupils learn about online safety and how to navigate the community safely. Pupils access rich wider development activities through many sports, arts, music and trips that build life skills and independence. Pupils also engage with national celebrations, as well as key theme weeks that develop respect and understanding of others.

Next steps

- Leaders should secure and then maintain high levels of attendance over time, for all pupils across all three sites, by further strengthening their work with families and external partners.
 - Leaders should ensure that all staff sharpen their checks on pupils' understanding and provide feedback which deepens pupils' skills and knowledge.
 - Leaders should ensure that all pupils secure the foundational knowledge they need, particularly in literacy and numeracy, to successfully access and develop their learning across the curriculum.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the three heads of school and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs and/or disabilities lead; both proprietors and chair of the 'school improvement partners' (governors). Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff, including subject leads, and pupils.

The names of the co-proprietors are Abide Zenenga and Anthony Copeland

The chair of the 'school improvement partners' is Mark Taylor

The fees currently charged are £20,834 to £45,000

The email address of the school is info@riverside-education.co.uk

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

Pupils attending the school have a range of complex neurological and psychological needs. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school operates from three sites at: Riverside Education, 2, Riverside Drive, Stechford, Birmingham, West Midlands, B33 9BF; Riverside Vocational College, 17, The Gardens,

Erdington, Birmingham, West Midlands, B23 6AG; Riverside Farm, Redhill Road, Birmingham, West Midlands, B38 9EH.

The school admitted its first pupils in 2015.

The school currently has 100 pupils on roll, with a capacity of 100 pupils

Headteacher: Abide Zenenga

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Stuart Clarkson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Martin Spoor, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 30 June 2026

Total pupils

100

School capacity

100

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

90

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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