

The Brambles

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Brambles school opened in September 2009. The school is one of two schools owned by the Beechkeys group and provides day education for boys of secondary school age who have social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties. The school is situated in new, purpose-built premises in a semi-rural location near the town of Leyland. This is its first full inspection.

There are 22 boys aged from 11 to 15 years on roll; all but two are aged 11 to 14 years of age. All but one student has a statement of educational needs. Two local authorities currently place students at the school. Students have typically been excluded from their previous school. A number have transferred from the company's linked primary school. Five students are children who are looked after by local authorities.

The school aims to re-engage students into the life and routines of school and promote their attendance. It seeks 'to develop positive, socially adjusted young men who can successfully re-integrate into society and lead productive, purposeful lives.'

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education provided is outstanding. The school meets its aims very well. It provides a good curriculum that interests the students and enables them to make outstanding progress both in managing their behaviour and in filling in the gaps in their basic skills and knowledge. Students' behaviour during the inspection was outstanding; they show very good attitudes to learning. Much of this is a direct result of outstanding teaching and assessment systems that focus closely on individual students, their needs and achievement. The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. Safeguarding practice and procedures are robust. The school meets all the regulations for independent schools.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, with several strengths. It successfully engages the students in learning. The curriculum closely follows the National Curriculum. Programmes for students to improve their basic skills in English and mathematics are particularly well structured. Students make exceptionally good progress in literacy and numeracy. This strong priority on acquiring basic skills stands students in good stead for taking the next steps in their education or training.

As the school expands, school leaders are aware that they will need to extend the current range of courses and accreditation beyond that currently available for students in Key Stage 4, notably in developing further their life skills, including work-related learning. The school currently offers entry level qualifications in English and mathematics, and a Level 1 course in horticulture, and has begun to explore further possibilities for the future.

The core curriculum at both key stages also includes science, humanities, information and communication technology (ICT), art and design, physical education (PE), personal, social and health education, with citizenship (PSHE) and outdoor education. Provision for outdoor education is good, and makes a strong contribution in helping to keep students healthy. At a local sports centre and outdoor sporting venues, students take part in activities such as rock-climbing, orienteering and walking. This builds up their self-confidence and their skills in working with others. Students learn to play rugby and compete in a local school football league.

There is good, imaginative provision for music. All students receive individual tuition in guitar, drums or singing; all but one student currently choose to do so. There is a small school band. Students create and record music, for example, making a short CD to take home for Christmas. Such activities introduce students to new skills and help to foster positive attitudes to school. Good leisure activities at lunchtime, including the 'WII' computer-based activity, access to the school library, and games rooms add to students' enjoyment of school. The school is very well resourced, particularly in the provision of interactive whiteboards in every classroom. These have enabled teachers to draw on a wide range of imaginative resources that engage students and promote their learning.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding overall. There are specialist teachers for all the core subjects. All teachers have a strong background in working with students who have special educational needs of this nature. This expertise is evident in the lessons; the vast majority observed were outstanding, imaginatively and carefully prepared to meet the needs of the students particularly well. Teachers use ICT very effectively and imaginatively as an integral part of all lessons to promote learning and bring lessons to life, adding relevance. For example, they used video clips when introducing discussion work in science on cholera in nineteenth century London; and when learning about battles in the Trojan War, in history. Students get actively engaged in learning. Consequently, progress in lessons seen was good, and often outstanding. Work is adjusted within the small classes of up to seven students, so

that individual students have work appropriate to their level and do not become bored.

Key workers provide invaluable support, encouraging individual students in their work and in fostering exemplary behaviour. The special educational needs coordinator is very effectively deployed, to support individual students in improving literacy, on a withdrawal basis from lessons, but also in the youngest class, to assess students' progress in listening and speaking skills on a day-to-day basis. In this way, the school is successfully and promptly identifying where students need to improve.

Students are assessed on entry to the school and teachers in all subjects log progress carefully on a regular basis. Overall, students' progress since joining the school both academically, and in their behaviour, is outstanding. The assessment systems are good, but do not currently show students' progress through National Curriculum levels over time and the school is aware of the need to do so as students spend longer in the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good overall. Through the PSHE programme students have frequent opportunities to reflect on topics that are relevant to them and to express their views. Visitors into school, such as a crime prevention officer, enhance this programme. Students' behaviour is outstanding. A good number of students in their questionnaires disagreed that behaviour was good. However, observations throughout the inspection and scrutiny of the school's records show a much better picture than students' own image historically of how they behave. Students are actively engaged in learning and cooperate well with one another and with staff. Teachers have high expectations that students will concentrate and try hard.

Students say that they are happy at school and do feel that they are learning to manage their own behaviour well. They follow a few, simple school rules based on respect for one another and for property. A system of rewards operates effectively to encourage positive behaviour. Individual educational plans helpfully spell out suitable strategies for teachers to adopt when managing behaviour, with clearly-focused targets as to how students can improve both their behaviour and standards of work.

Attendance is high and many students' attendance has risen significantly. Students have a good sense of belonging to the school as a community. They take good care of the premises and have recently established a school council. Students' spiritual education is satisfactory, fostered mainly through daily assemblies. The provision for students to learn about other religions and cultures is satisfactory. The school agrees that it is timely to look at additional opportunities for enhancing this aspect of students' personal development and so promote further their understanding and tolerance of others.

Welfare, health and safety of students

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. A comprehensive range of policies and thorough record-keeping underpin this. Key workers play a vital role in providing continuity of care as they drive the minibuses that take students to and from school each day, assist in lessons and provide a listening ear. This system of transportation to school is of real benefit to students, in offering easy contact with families and fostering regular attendance very effectively.

Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students say that the staff teach and support them well. Staff manage behaviour well and students are closely supervised. Restraint is used only as a last resort. As a result, there is a calm and pleasant atmosphere for learning. Students say that they feel safe; their questionnaire responses support this view.

The PSHE programme promotes welfare, health and safety very effectively, with good emphasis on helping students learn how to keep safe. Students learn, for example, about the dangers of illegal substances and the risks from smoking. The provision of a hot, cooked meal at lunchtime, and the good opportunities the school provides for exercise, help to promote students' health.

Safeguarding practice is good. Child protection training for staff is up to date. The school works proactively with outside agencies and professionals to support students' emotional well-being. The school complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school conducts all the checks that are required on staff, including a check with the Criminal Records Bureau. Recruitment procedures are thorough. The school maintains a record of the checks undertaken on a single central register, as required.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The premises are excellent, being newly purpose-built as a school. They are now much bigger, with more extensive facilities, than at the time the school was first registered. The premises are very pleasant, light, bright and peaceful. There are over 11 classrooms with five general classrooms plus an art room, a music room, a science laboratory, an ICT room, a PSHE room and rooms for recreation or for quiet time. All classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. One classroom has a library area. The accommodation includes modern washrooms and a shower room with private cubicles, for showering after PE. There is a room for students who may be unwell and a fully-equipped school kitchen. An assembly hall has a separate, dedicated dining area. Outside, there is a good-sized garden and a large, fenced

playground equipped for football. The school is spacious for the number of students currently on roll and can accommodate more students, as the school intends.

Provision of information

The school provides all the information it should. This is given in a clearly written handbook for parents with a copy of its safeguarding policy available on request. .

The reports on students' progress are good. They provide specific, helpful detail on each subject, and on each aspect of literacy and numeracy, with the levels students are attaining. They also give a clear assessment of how well students are doing in respect of other outcomes related to their well-being, such as their health and the extent of their positive contribution.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's policy and procedures meet all the requirements of this regulation.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- develop further the range of courses, including work-related learning, and provide accreditation for Key Stage 4 students, to further prepare them for the next stage in their education, training or employment
- as the school becomes more established, build on the current assessment systems to show the progress that students make through National Curriculum levels over time whilst at the school
- enhance the opportunities for students to learn about other cultures and religions to develop further their awareness, understanding and tolerance towards diverse beliefs and lifestyles.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students ' needs	✓			
How well students make progress in their learning	✓			

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students ' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of students	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students		✓		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special		
Date school opened	September 2009		
Age range of students	11-16		
Gender of students	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 22	Girls: 0	Total: 22
Number of students with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 21	Girls: 0	Total: 21
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 0	Total: 5
Annual fees (day students)	£31,281		
Address of school	159 Longmeanygate Midge Hall Leyland Preston PR26 7TB		
Telephone number	01772 454826		
Email address	reception@thebrambleschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Alan Rainford		
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited		