

Friern Barnet School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101345
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	354984
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	803
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms M Johnson
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Turner
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2007
School address	Hemington Avenue Friern Barnet Barnet N11 3LS
Telephone number	0208 3682777
Fax number	0208 3683208
Email address	school@friern.barnet.sch.uk

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M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 37 parts of lessons taught by 36 teachers. They also visited lessons to look at students' books. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, senior and middle leaders, groups of students and a few parents. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including policies, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the induction pack for governors, the school's improvement plan, and a range of policies including for example, safeguarding and equality. They also looked at records of students' progress and the quality of provision. Questionnaires returned by 125 parents and carers, 150 students and 27 members of staff were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key questions.

- Taking students' starting points into account, are they making at least satisfactory progress in mathematics and working at the levels they should be?
- Does the provision for different groups of students, in particular those identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are at the early stage of learning English as an additional language, enable them to be well integrated and achieve consistently well?
- How much has the school improved the quality of teaching and use of assessment data to accelerate learning since the previous inspection?
- How well have changes to the school's systems and organisation been established, to ensure that there is capacity for sustained improvement?

Information about the school

Friern Barnet is smaller than most secondary schools and is a popular choice with parents. The school serves a diverse range of minority ethnic groups but the majority are drawn from a number of urban wards. Over two thirds of students are from minority ethnic groups; the largest single group are of White British heritage; the next largest groups include students of Indian background and Eastern European heritage. Almost half of the students speak English as an additional language, which is higher than the national average, but very few are at the early stages of learning English. A high proportion of students have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, and more than usual have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average.

The school has had specialist status in performing arts since 2004. It works in partnership with several providers including local primary and secondary schools, other local organisations and higher education institutes. The school is recognised as a training school and has a range of awards including the Specialist School and Academies Trust and Healthy School Initiative. Although at the time of the inspection, the school was dealing with a personnel issue, the focus on improvement was maintained.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

'The staff work very hard and the school creates a positive approach to learning for the students. Achievement is encouraged and celebrated for all students and special talents are recognised.' This quotation from a parent accurately describes the outstanding achievement of Friern Barnet School. It is an outstanding school where students achieve highly despite the majority having specific learning needs.

Friern Barnet School has improved rapidly since the previous inspection because of the very sharp focus on students enjoying and excelling in their education and life. The year-on-year improvement in students' attainment has been sustained and is unabated. Consequently, students' attainment is now above average overall, their achievement is outstanding, and Friern Barnet is in the top 10% of secondary schools nationally.

High achievement is linked to an exemplary and inclusive curriculum which offers a rich range of courses and enrichment activities that are tailored to the needs of individuals and groups of students. The specialist curriculum has an impact on students' personal development, their learning and achievement as it pervades all aspects of the school's work. Exemplary care, guidance and support ensure that excellent links with many external agencies, parents and a well-thought-out pastoral system select and match resources to students' needs. These provisions contribute to consistently good teaching and behaviour, overall. The school uses exceptionally good systems to track and support students. However, these systems are not used consistently to give students clear feedback on what they need to do to improve their work further.

The long journey to school improvement has been successful primarily because the exemplary leadership of the headteacher, surrounded by a strong senior team, has maintained a tunnel vision on students realising the school's motto, 'Enjoy and Excel'. The firm commitment to students achieving very well permeates all levels of the leadership team, the teachers and all staff. High expectations mean that clear and sophisticated systems of accountability, monitoring and evaluation are embedded.

Consistent accountability, coupled with a sharp focus on sustaining a culture of learning, ensures that all staff and students achieve their targets. A formidable governing body, made up of experts from a range of fields, constantly challenges and reviews the school's work. As a result, there is a culture of learning. The leadership team knows very well the strengths and weaknesses of the school; priorities are well ordered and informed by the commitment to continuous improvement. The school has established a strong foundation on which to build its success and, as a result, value for money and the capacity for further improvement are outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure assessment information is used consistently well to give students guidance about the next steps in their learning by:
 - marking their work regularly
 - using the lesson success criteria to give them clear feedback, so that they know and understand how to improve their work
 - providing clear guidelines that enable them to take pride in their work and presentation.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school with attainment that is below the national average and they make exceptionally good progress by the time they leave in Year 11. Based on their starting points, students exceed expectations because consistently good teaching and targeted support ensure they are suitably stretched. GCSE results have risen significantly each year since the previous inspection. In 2010, 89% of students attained five or more GCSE grades A* to C and the proportion gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics was average. Early entry for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics indicates above average attainment for the current academic year. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities attained above average results and made similar progress to their peers. All groups, regardless of their ability or ethnicity, made similar progress in the most recent GCSE examinations. In lessons observed, there was no distinguishing pattern in the positive attitude and application to learning among the diverse range of students. Academic attainment in the specialist subject is high.

The school is highly effective at analysing data to identify students who are at risk of underachieving. The excellent range of support provided has had, for example, a positive impact on the achievement of White British students and those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable.

Students have an excellent understanding about how to keep safe and are very confident about their safety and security in the school. They are articulate about the teachers maintaining vigilance all the time and are particularly appreciative of the work of the link police officer. Students acquire a wide range of skills as they progress through the school. Their extensive involvement in performing arts activities increases their confidence and sensibility. Students adapt well to their different roles and responsibilities as ambassadors within the school and wider community. Additionally, their involvement in enterprise activities ensures they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world of work. Although students are actively involved in all aspects of school life, for example, as learning consultants, parliament or house representatives and mentors, inspectors agree with students that opportunities for them to take control of their parliament are undeveloped. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong particularly in relation to meting out justice. Socially, this ethnically diverse group of students enjoys good relationships and they adopt a strong stance against racist and other forms of discriminatory behaviour. While behaviour is good overall, a few students do not always adhere well to the rules. This leads other students feeling that not all teachers follow the disciplinary procedures fairly and consistently. Attendance is improving but slowly because

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a few students, whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, are persistently absent despite stringent actions and support from the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is consistently effective in ensuring that students are motivated and engaged in learning. Strong features of teaching include well-structured lessons with clear learning objectives, a brisk pace, high expectations and challenge, active learning tasks, probing questions and the effective use of a good range of resources to develop independent learning. In particular, information and communication technology, as a tool, is used very well in lessons and by students to extend their learning. As a result of the emphasis on professionalism, there is much good practice. However, there are occasions when the expected practice is not applied and when this occurs, lessons are satisfactory. In such lessons, students are passive learners, expectations are unclear and teaching lacks pace and variety.

Exemplary assessment procedures contribute to teachers successfully tailoring work to students' needs. Nevertheless, marking is not always consistent or thorough with sufficient guidance on what students can do to improve their work. In addition, students are not taught how to take pride in their work and presentation skills are undeveloped.

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The curriculum offers students rich opportunities for high-quality learning and wider personal development. Progress is accelerated and achievement is strong because the curriculum is flexible and personalised. The constant adjustment of what is provided results in students following the most appropriate course, which is customised to their needs. The partnership work that arises from the specialism provides further breadth and depth to the curriculum.

Systems and procedures for providing care, guidance and support are outstanding. Transition arrangements are exemplary and supportive. Early and pre-emptive action means that there is excellent precision and attention to detail for intervention for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Information, analysis, evaluation and intervention ensure that every student receives the guidance and support that they need.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school does not stand still because continuous improvement is a standing item on the agenda. The headteacher's clear vision of high achievement for all students is well supported by a committed team of senior staff, middle managers and the governing body. Strong teamwork among a highly skilled senior team and a forceful governing body has ensured that the school has not been deterred from setting challenging targets for the current school year. The governing body makes extensive use of its expertise to support the school and does not flinch when asking the school to justify its work and targets. For example, the governing body knows the school intimately and key priorities, such as attainment in English and mathematics and exclusions, drive their monitoring and discussions at committee meetings. It fulfils statutory duties very well and ensures that safeguarding requirements are robust and kept under review. The tightly structured systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work ensure that line management is unremitting.

Parents are very well informed about their child's progress and, as a leading school in using assessment data, leaders and managers ensure that equality of opportunity is at the forefront of what the school provides. Underperformance, where it occurs is spotted quickly and strategies to eliminate it are identified and applied successfully. For example, the school is gradually reducing the exclusions of students with special educational needs. Additionally, barriers that hinder students and families whose circumstances make them hard to reach are dismantled.

Innovative partnership work within the local and wider community provides opportunities for students to raise their achievement. There is care and attention to the Equality Act as

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there is to promoting community cohesion. Analyses of students' ethnic, religious, social and cultural background have been used well to develop the school's promotion of this work. For example, creative partnerships' project and drama work has an impact on students' literacy and communication skills, their self-confidence and transition from primary to secondary school. Nevertheless, the school has still to develop the audit on this work. The school knows the strengths and weakness of its work well, and uses its resources skilfully to ensure that outcomes for students are outstanding.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires and those who spoke to the inspectors were very positive about the safety of their child at the school. While very few parents submitted critical comments, a very small minority disagreed with most aspects of the school's work. The school has substantial records of survey results spanning over three academic years. Analyses of the results of the surveys indicate a consistently positive picture and increasing satisfaction with the school's work. The negative responses, particularly in relation to students' enjoyment and their progress, provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, healthy lifestyle, behaviour and management of the school are contrary to previous survey results and more specifically to the recent findings in December 2010.

During the inspection, the school was dealing with a personnel issue, which, although internal to the school, had impacted on the wider community. Nevertheless, because of the concerns raised, particularly about behaviour and leadership and management, the inspection team looked in detail at all of the key points identified above. As noted in the report, the inspection evidence does not accord with the negative comments and

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objections raised in a small minority of the questionnaires. Rather, the inspection evidence endorses previous survey findings about the positive attributes of the school's work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Friern Barnet School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 803 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	26	57	54	14	13	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	26	25	69	66	8	8	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	28	60	57	14	13	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	26	58	55	15	14	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	25	24	56	53	12	11	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	22	58	55	14	13	4	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	17	58	55	14	13	4	4
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	22	62	59	11	10	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	20	58	55	15	14	4	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	15	54	51	22	21	8	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	17	58	55	14	13	7	7
The school is led and managed effectively	24	23	53	50	14	13	4	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	30	48	46	10	10	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Dear Students

Inspection of Friern Barnet School, Barnet, N11 3LS

Thank you for your openness and help during our inspection of your school. We enjoyed being met by the ambassadors and meeting some of you and appreciated your comments and views. We were impressed by your courtesy and maturity.

Friern Barnet is an outstanding school. Since the previous inspection in 2007, results have improved each year. The best results were achieved in 2010 when a high proportion of students gained above average results in the GCSE examinations. In addition, the number of students now attaining GCSE passes in English and mathematics is set to increase this school year. At least 50% of you have already gained a grade in these subjects. These results are quite remarkable. Well done! Your achievement has risen under the headteacher's leadership because he has a clear vision that you can all excel in school and later life. This is being realised because he is well supported by the governing body and other leaders.

The school provides you with exciting opportunities to develop your talents in performing arts. There is a good range of activities, which you enjoy, but although the school enables you to develop negotiation skills, it is not yet giving you sufficient opportunity to take control of making decisions during council and parliamentary meetings. You make rapid progress because you can select courses that suit your needs best. This motivates you to work well. The teachers care about you and provide exemplary guidance and support. Your behaviour in lessons is good and we saw some excellent behaviour and application to your work. Nevertheless, responses to the questionnaire and discussions indicate that a few of you do not always behave well. Relationships in the school are strong and you are intolerant when equal opportunity is not pursued. This is good evidence that you are being well prepared for the next stage of your life.

Although the school is outstanding, there are always areas of its work that could be tweaked. The school is very clear about what it has to do to make sure that your achievement remains high. At this stage, the inspection team has left one important area for development, which will involve the teachers marking your books regularly and giving you clear guidance about what to do next to improve your work.

The school has demonstrated that it will continue to improve and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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