

Barrs Court School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117051
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	358068
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Kathy Hooper

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Rooke and Dick Makin (joint)
Headteacher	Richard John Aird
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Eleven lessons were observed and eight teachers seen. Three focus groups were observed, taken by two teaching assistants. Meetings were held with middle and senior staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at teachers' planning, students' assessment records, minutes of meetings, and evidence of monitoring. They analysed 32 questionnaires from parents and carers, 53 from students and six from staff.

The inspection team looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively does the school evaluate the progress made by individuals and groups of students, and is this linked to evaluation of the quality of teaching?
- How successful is the school in developing students' spiritual understanding and their awareness of the diverse nature of society in the United Kingdom?
- How well does the provision match the ages, different abilities (including the most able) and special educational needs of the groups that the school serves?
- How effectively does specialist status contribute to outcomes for students and increase the school's capacity to improve?

Information about the school

The school is a foundation special school catering for students aged 11 to 19 with a diverse range of learning difficulties. All have statements of special educational needs including: profound, multiple learning difficulty (PMLD); severe learning difficulty (SLD); moderate learning difficulties (MLD); and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) often associated with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit and hyperactivity (ADHD). The number of students entitled to free school meals is higher than in other schools. Almost all the students are of White British heritage. The school is over-subscribed and there are approximately twice as many boys as girls. The catchment is predominantly rural and extends across the whole county. The school has been awarded Investors in People, Football Association Charter Mark, Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark, ICT Mark, Artsmark Silver, and Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS).

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 school makes outstanding provision for its students. One of the families served by the school sums up parents' satisfaction in saying: 'Having made little to no progress at his previous school my child has blossomed.' The school's careful self-evaluation and monitoring, and innovative leadership have dramatically improved provision, demonstrating an excellent capacity to make sustained improvement in the future. There is no evidence of any inequality between groups, of differences in the performance of boys and girls, or of minority ethnic groups.

Students make outstanding progress in their personal development. The attention given to addressing individual barriers to learning is outstanding, and leads to an exceptionally warm and supportive ethos throughout the school. Students are reflective and tolerant of individual differences and including different cultures, for example, through art and music. Attendance and behaviour are both outstanding. Students make good progress throughout the school. Sixth form students make outstanding progress in a wide range of accredited courses. Specialist school status has enabled significant improvements in the accommodation, such as a state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pool. Students and the community benefit hugely from an impressive range of partnerships through which students develop great confidence and excellent social and personal skills.

Teaching and learning are good. The best lessons provide exciting and memorable experiences that students much enjoy. Teachers use new technologies imaginatively, and address the full range of learning styles with the aid of well-chosen resources. In outstanding lessons, all students are fully engaged in tasks that are closely tailored to their ability. Teachers assess learning systematically against students' individual learning outcomes but in occasional lessons, teachers do not check the small steps students make in their learning sufficiently well. The curriculum is outstanding, and that for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is nationally recognised. There is a unique system of focus groups, led by aspiring teaching assistants. Exciting curricular and extra-curricular experiences make excellent contributions to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The quality of care, support and guidance is exceptional. A parent comments that her child no longer drags his feet about going to school, but runs out to the taxi in the morning, 'hurrying up the escort' to get to school as quickly as possible.

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. Energetic, empathetic, and visionary leadership on the part of the headteacher percolates throughout the school. The school rigorously evaluates all aspects of its work. There are extremely coherent systems for oversight of all aspects of the development of its students, in close partnership with parents and carers. As a result, accurate priorities are identified, making the school a dynamic and inspiring institution. The governing body is outstandingly able, challenging,

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and supportive. It has been strategic in raising funds to develop provision, and instrumental in setting up the overarching Trust for Learning Disability.

There is an innovative career structure for aspiring teachers, so that apprentices can progress to become teaching assistants, and then qualified teachers. Staff appraisal is directly linked to students' progress and career development. The school has excellent partnerships with other special and mainstream schools, and a wide range of community organisations. It provides outstanding value for money. All available resources are used wisely and efficiently to ensure the very best outcomes for all students and continuous improvements in provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teachers' assessments of students' learning in all lessons are consistently used to inform lesson planning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' achievement is good. They make good progress in their lessons because teachers understand their needs well. Students in Key Stage 3 enjoyed working on different tasks to support their reading, using pictures to show their understanding, ordering the events of the story, and videoing their own version of the Queen's Knickers. Key Stage 4 students learned to distinguish creeping from stomping using untuned instruments such as tambourines and shakers, having watched a dramatic video. Students with profound and multiple disabilities responded extremely well to stimulus, using new technology, in a focus group taken by a teaching assistant.

Students make outstanding progress in their personal development. Many arrive with previously poor experiences but the school enables them to develop into confident, socially aware young people who understand how to keep themselves and others safe and healthy. The most able explain how they have learned to become responsible members of the school and are proud of their experiences in the community. A parent typically states: 'Since going to Barrs Court, he has improved so much to the point where he is a totally different child.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Profoundly disabled students are extremely responsive and derive huge enjoyment and benefit from experiences, such as those in the multi-sensory hydrotherapy pool.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching provides enjoyable and interesting activities that engage students well. Skilled teaching assistants work exceptionally well in classrooms and in focus groups, providing seamless support for each student. The best lessons acknowledge students' preferred method of communication and make excellent use of well-chosen resources that support their understanding. Occasionally, teachers do not fully assess students' small steps in progress.

The curriculum is extremely well-tailored to the individual needs of students. Great care is taken to ensure that students are set challenging targets and receive their entitlement. The taught curriculum is augmented by extra-curricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and work in the community. Two thirds of students attend after school clubs; all have residential experiences and are involved in school productions. At Key Stage 4, there is an impressive range of vocational courses. Students and their families are helped to choose appropriately. Specialist status has enabled students to be incrementally introduced to the world of work and decision-making in the school and local community. Excellent opportunities are provided to engage students in arts, leisure and sports outside school, such as performances in the local theatre. As a result, they develop excellent social and personal skills, and higher attaining students speak maturely about

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their growing abilities. Provision is made for more able students to attend classes in neighbouring mainstream schools.

Care, support and guidance are second to none. The school's excellent partnerships with families through its open-door policy, workshops, diaries, newsletters, coffee mornings and regular surveys ensure the best possible provision. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school: 'Reading, writing and speech are showing a clear improvement to us at home already! A big difference in just eight months.' The care taken to ensure smooth transitions and work for students during extended absences in hospital is exemplary.

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 headteacher and his senior management team drive improvements exceptionally well because of the clarity of their vision and their in-depth understanding of individual circumstances. Extensive and detailed monitoring is impressive. The promotion of equality of opportunity is at the heart of all the school's work. There is an excellent focus on the development of the whole child. Individual barriers to learning, along with all aspects of achievement, are fully and rigorously explored, with students, and their families, as the basis for framing demanding targets for students. Thorough data analysis informs priorities for staff and school development. For example, although higher attaining students were found to be making less than expected progress last year, they are now making good progress as a result of the school's actions.

The governing body works as an extremely effective team. It is extensively engaged with the school, prompting and promoting developments, while challenging and supporting staff. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary. Students' changing needs are exceptionally well reflected in policies and staff training. Students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is the result of good community cohesion. The school's work in the community provides a powerful vehicle for developing a positive regard for the contributions from the special needs community. The school has successfully audited the characteristics of its community, but has yet to fully evaluate its impact in order to inform future plans.

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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	2
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

Sixth form

Students excel in the sixth form because they are engaged in activities that they readily perceive as necessary for their adult life. All of them go on to employment or further education. In the past two years, three students have gained employment in the community. Students regularly prepare food for sale in school through the Barrs Court Butties scheme. They consult clients about their preferences before shopping, preparation and sale.

Teaching is closely linked to vocational accreditation. The relevance of the curriculum and the exceptional nature of the care, guidance and support are clear in the continued improvements in student's progress. Positive feedback from employers in the service and leisure industries includes the benefits their organisations gain from the students.

A new coordinator has increased the range and number of courses available and works closely with the senior management team. Outcomes are thoroughly analysed and used imaginatively to improve provision, such as that to establish a centre for lifelong learning within the local authority, while accommodating a growing post-16 population.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the benefits they and their children receive from the school. The inspection team found that the school has a range of strategies for families to use to communicate with the school. The response rate was slightly higher than average.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Barrs Court 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 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 80 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	78	7	22	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	75	8	25	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	72	9	28	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	53	14	44	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	72	9	28	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	72	7	22	2	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	69	10	31	0	0	0	0
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)	20	63	12	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	78	6	19	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	66	11	34	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	69	6	19	3	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	78	7	22	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	81	6	19	0	0	0	0

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



12 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Barrs Court School, Hereford, HR1 1EQ

Thank you so much for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting all of you. We really enjoyed finding out about all the good things you do at Barrs Court School. We very much enjoyed talking to you, visiting your lessons, and looking at your work.

We found your school to be one of the best in the country. This is because all the adults in your school help you to get better at what you do, and know how best to help you. We were impressed by your friendliness to each other and your kindness to visitors. We found that you work really hard in lessons, but you are able to have lots of fun too. We could see how much you enjoy school because of all the exciting things your teachers plan for you and the way they help you to learn. We were most impressed by your hydrotherapy pool and how much you benefit from using it.

We have asked your teachers to make your lessons even better by keeping better records of what you have learned and what you have found difficult. You can help them to do this by asking your teachers how well you have done in your work and telling them how much you enjoyed it.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Hooper
Lead inspector

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