

# Brandles School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131060
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	360196
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Declan McCarthy

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	43
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kathy Dunnett
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Vickery
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Weston Way Baldock SG7 6EY
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed six lessons taught by four teachers. Inspectors held informal discussions with students and met with a small group of parents and four members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including attendance records, the incident book, safeguarding policies, the school development plan, monitoring visit reports from the school improvement partner, students' work and tracking data. Inspectors also analysed the responses to questionnaires returned from staff, students and 13 parents.

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

- What impact is persistent absenteeism having on students' achievement overall and what steps the school is taking to ensure students who are persistently absent catch up with their work?
- How is the teaching of religious education planned for and what is the impact of the increased opportunities for accreditation in vocational courses and the school's action plan for literacy on students' achievement?
- How well are the new assessment systems used in planning to cater for different learning needs and in tracking students' progress?
- Are members of the governing body challenging the work of the school sufficiently in helping to build its capacity for sustained improvement?

## Information about the school

Brandles School provides for students with behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties (BESD), many of whom have experienced disruption in their education. Each student has a statement of special educational needs, primarily for BESD. A few students have additional moderate learning difficulties and approximately one third have been identified with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), a marked increase in this group since the last inspection. A small minority of students are designated as 'looked-after' by the local authority, but not all are in local authority care homes. A third of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The school has Investors in People status and holds the Eco Schools award. There have been a few changes since the last inspection. The leadership team has been strengthened with the recent appointment of a new deputy headteacher and new governors are in post. The science and art and technology rooms have been refurbished and a new, fully-equipped practical area for food technology has been created.

**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?****2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

## Main findings

Brandles is a good school. Students' achievement is good and attainment is steadily rising as a result of the strong drive for raising achievement by the headteacher who is ably supported by the new deputy headteacher. Good care, guidance and support has resulted in good improvements in students' behaviour, their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and improved attendance with a sharp reduction in the rate of unauthorised absence. Although the persistent absence of a few students has no significant impact on achievement overall because the school takes steps to support students at home, it recognises that more needs to be done to reduce the rate of unauthorised absence further. Parents spoke highly of the school's work describing it as the 'best school ever' and highlighting the good pastoral care and good teaching which has led their children's good progress.

Most students enter the school with low levels of attainment. They make good progress towards their individual targets and in their accredited courses and are on course to leave with broadly average attainment. This is because teaching is good and the curriculum is personalised to meet their individual needs and aspirations. The range of courses available to students has increased considerably from 2010. Students at Key Stage 4 can now choose from vocational, academic or work-related learning options. Students Year 10 now have opportunities to take GCSE in English and in Year 11 they have entered for the BTEC Diploma in performing arts for the first time. The strong emphasis on promoting literacy for students at Key Stage 3 has had a good impact on their progress in reading, although this is less marked in writing because there are fewer opportunities to promote writing creatively across different subjects. Teachers manage behaviour well, which results in students' good behaviour in lessons. Students stay safe as a result of good promotion of safeguarding. Although there are good opportunities for students to work independently in lessons, opportunities for collaborative learning are limited. Teachers make good use of assessment to plan for different learning needs and to match work to students' abilities. The new systems of assessment are used well to track students' progress. Although marking informs students how well they are doing, it does not always guide them in how to improve their work.

Good leadership and management is reflected in the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and good use of accurate school self-evaluation to set clear priorities for improvement. This has led to good improvements in all aspects of the school's work, particularly in the quality of teaching and the curriculum, which have resulted in good outcomes for students. As a result, the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. Members of the governing body are supportive of the school but have yet to develop their own view of the school's strengths and areas for development through a schedule of focused visits.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance by:
  - reducing the rate of unauthorised absence by 10% by the end of the next academic year
  - continuing to work closely with the local authority and outside professionals to reduce persistent absenteeism
  - providing more incentives for the few students who are persistently absent to attend regularly.
- Raise achievement by:
  - providing more opportunities for collaborative learning in lessons
  - ensuring greater consistency in the quality of marking, so that students always know how to improve their learning
  - fully implementing plans to extend opportunities for creative writing across a range of subjects and evaluate the impact of this on students' achievement.
- Develop the strategic monitoring role of the governing body by implementing a schedule of planned focus visits so that members can form their own view of the school's effectiveness and influence school developments.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Students' achievement is good and they make good progress in learning. In lessons, students focused on their tasks, listened carefully and work hard. As a result of this and their good behaviour, which impacts positively on their learning, they made good progress. From their low starting points on entry to school, students make good progress in their accredited courses which include a range of GCSE, adult literacy and adult numeracy certificates and a range of vocational courses, including performing arts, construction and fitness. Students also make good progress in work-related learning and in their personal development which prepares them well for the next stage of their learning. All students leave school to enter further education or work placements. At Key Stage 3, students make better progress in reading than in writing as there are fewer opportunities to stimulate creative writing in different subjects. Students with additional special educational needs and the few who speak English as an additional language make equally good progress as their peers because good support is provided which enable them to tackle small steps in their learning successfully.

Students stay fit and healthy. They make healthy choices at lunchtimes, exercise vigorously and participate in adventurous outdoor activities. The school council is active in developing ideas for the school. Students have designed their new school uniform and have taken the lead in shaping the school's system of rewards. The school is currently developing opportunities for increasing students' contribution to the wider community. As they move through the school, students gain in confidence and improve their self-esteem, developing a clear sense of right from wrong and improving their social skills. Their cultural development is promoted by opportunities to learn about cultural diversity, fair trade and world faiths through, for example, assemblies led by the Imam and local Christian clergy.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Teachers maintain good relationships with students, have high expectations of students' learning and manage behaviour well. Teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory and most was good. Teachers make good use of information from assessment in lessons to match work to different learning needs and to set clear learning outcomes for students. Although students' work is marked regularly and informs students how well they are doing, marking does not always inform them how to improve their learning. A range of strategies is used to motivate students, including opportunities for independent learning, although there are few planned opportunities to enable students to collaborate together and learn from one another.

The new assessment system is also used well to ensure that the curriculum is highly relevant to students' needs. Information about students' aptitudes and interests are used to individualise the curriculum. This enables them to choose between three pathways to learning which include academic, vocational and extended work experience. Although literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are promoted across subjects, the school recognises that more opportunities to extend writing in different subjects are needed to raise the profile of writing. Strong partnerships with local schools and the community considerably enhance students' learning and well-being. These include: visits by the local Royal Air Force, who work with students to develop team

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building and resilience; joint working with the local secondary school and with the local fire brigade to enhance responsibility; the science day provided by a local business; and visit to the local church. Opportunities to learn about and from religion permeate the curriculum, particularly through personal, social and health education. Students learn about different world religions in topics on diversity and they learn from religions by considering issues such as, Christian teachings on social justice. There is a wide range of increased accreditation available for students with new accreditation in religious education planned for in Year 11, together with vocational studies and performing arts. More students are taking GCSE and benefiting from good opportunities for work-related learning.

Strong links with outside agencies, such as the Connexions service, the youth offending team and the autistic advisory service, are having a positive impact on students' learning and well-being. The close monitoring of attendance and swift follow-up action by the school has significantly reduced the rate of unauthorised absence but the school is aware that more needs to be done to ensure this is further reduced. The school goes the extra mile in ensuring that persistent non-attenders are provided with work to do at home so that their absence does not have significant impact on overall achievement throughout the school.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

The strengthened leadership team are monitoring the impact of teaching, the curriculum and the use of assessments of students' learning and well-being. The strong drive for improvement is shared with middle leaders who have given good support to initiatives. The resulting improved provision is having a positive impact on students' progress and personal development. This is also seen in the good promotion of equality of opportunity where all groups of students, including those with additional special educational needs, make equally good progress. Discrimination of all kinds is dealt with effectively. The school is rigorous in ensuring students are safe at all times, which is reflected in the good promotion of safeguarding throughout the curriculum and in the day-to-day management of behaviour, the safe handling and close supervision of students. The governing body fulfils all of its statutory duties and supports the school well. Governors hold the school to account for its work through governing body meetings. However, they have not yet produced a schedule of focused visits to enable them to form their own view of the work of the school and influence the direction of school improvement. Good partnerships with local schools, businesses and within the community are having a positive impact on students' learning and well-being. Strong links with parents and carers are reflected in the

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high levels of satisfaction of the school's work and in the good return of parental questionnaires. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory, with a strong emphasis on forging links with local schools and the local community. However, the school has not evaluated the impact of its actions on students' personal development. The school makes good use of its available resources to ensure good outcomes for students and therefore provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

The rate of return of questionnaires from parents and carers was good for this type of school. They expressed overwhelming positive views about all aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked into the very few concerns raised by parents and carers. The school is well run. Students are well cared for and make good progress because they receive good support and teaching is good. Behaviour is dealt with effectively and students feel safe.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Brandles 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 13 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 43 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	54	5	38	1	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	9	69	4	31	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	5	38	7	54	1	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	38	7	54	1	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	7	54	6	46	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	38	7	54	1	8	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)	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	54	5	38	1	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	54	5	38	0	0	1	8
The school is led and managed effectively	7	54	5	38	1	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	77	2	15	1	8	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



15 June 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Brandles School, Baldock, SG7 6EY**

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to inspect your school. We were pleased with the good progress you are making in your behaviour and in your learning. We particularly liked the school uniform and badge which you have designed. Thank you for sharing your views of the school with us. You told us you feel safe in school and we agree that you are well cared for. Brandles is a good school. Good teaching ensures that you are all making good progress. Teachers make good use of their knowledge about your learning in planning activities which you can do and which extends your learning. The school is managed well and staff ensure that you are making good progress in your examination courses.

I have made a few suggestions to make your school even better.

? Most of you attend well, but there are a few students who are persistently absent from school. I have asked your school to look at ways of reducing this and promoting good attendance further. You can help by attending regularly.

? You could make even better progress if teachers provided you with more opportunities to learn from each other in lessons, ensured that you are shown how to improve your work when it is marked and gave you more opportunities to develop your writing in different subjects.

? Members of the governing body support the school well but should visit the school more regularly to see for themselves how good it is and what needs to be improved.

Keep trying your best and good luck to those of you who are taking examinations.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy

Lead inspector

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