

Bower Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119036
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358482
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adrian Perry
Headteacher	Trevor Phipps
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 16 lessons taught by 13 teachers and visited many other lessons as part of learning walks. Meetings were held with school leaders and managers, representatives from the governing body and two groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, the governing body minutes, and records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring. They analysed the responses from the 102 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 94 pupils and 92 staff.

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

- How well pupils make progress in their basic skills, particularly those who are not of White British heritage.
- The impact pupils' behaviour has on learning, especially in the primary section of the school.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on pupils' learning and progress, especially the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning.
- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels are driving improvements.
- How well children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make progress, particularly in writing and their emotional development.

Information about the school

Bower Grove is a specialist sport and ICT school of average size that caters for pupils with behaviour and learning needs, following a re-designation in 2005. Most pupils have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. The profile of pupils' needs has changed significantly since the previous inspection and a few pupils in older year groups have more diverse needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Two thirds of the pupils are in Key Stages 3 and 4. A few of the school's pupils are integrated into mainstream education at two local schools. These satellite locations are led and managed by Bower Grove teachers.

The largest group in the school are pupils from White British backgrounds. The school has a lower-than-average percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Few speak English as an additional language and none is at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a class with Year 1 and 2 pupils. The school holds the Eco-schools Bronze award and the Quality Mark for excellence in sport.

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

Bower Grove is a good school. The impact of re-designation as a behaviour and learning school has been felt particularly strongly during the time since the previous inspection. Nevertheless, school leaders and managers have ensured that good quality teaching has been sustained so that pupils continue to make good progress. This is because considerable emphasis has been placed on staff development, which has enhanced teachers' skills and confidence in educating pupils with behavioural needs. However, there is still some inconsistency in the quality of planning and delivery of lessons. Consequently, there are occasions where some pupils make slower progress. This is because learning activities are not always closely matched to individual pupils' needs and abilities so that they are fully challenged and supported in their learning.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They are particularly pleased that the outstanding level of care, guidance and support enables their children to be happy at school and enjoy learning. Comments such as, 'My son has had all the support and encouragement he has needed and he has thrived' are typical of those received from many parents and carers. The school engages parents and carers in their children's education exceptionally well.

Pupils feel exceptionally safe at school. This is often a positive change from their previous experiences at other schools and reflects the extensive work done by staff to provide a secure and nurturing environment. Overall, pupils' attendance is above average and their involvement in the school and wider community is outstanding, although pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 attend more regularly than younger pupils.

The outstanding curriculum continues to evolve to ensure that the changing needs of pupils are met extremely well. In particular, the school's specialism in sport ensures that pupils organise and participate in physical activities during lunchtime and after-school clubs as well as lessons. This makes a strong contribution to their outstanding adoption of healthy lifestyles and is recognised through the school's Quality Mark for excellence in sport. Outstanding partnerships with other schools and agencies ensure that pupils are able to access, for example, classes in mainstream school as well as professional support for their emotional needs.

Robust self-evaluation processes routinely involve all staff and take account of the views of pupils as well as their parents and carers. This ensures that leaders and managers at all levels, and the governing body, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, actions taken since the previous inspection have been well focused on developing appropriate provision for those with behavioural needs. The maintenance of good outcomes during this period of transition demonstrates that the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning, so that the achievement of all groups of pupils improves, by ensuring that:
 - learning activities are consistently well planned and delivered to closely match pupils' learning needs and provide suitable challenge
 - the deployment of teaching assistants in lessons is strongly focused on pupils' learning and progress
 - monitoring carried out by leaders and managers evaluates the progress made against previously identified areas for development.
- Improve pupils' attendance, particularly for those of primary age, by:
 - promoting good attendance through the school so that pupils, parents, carers and staff know and understand targets for improvement
 - ensuring that parents and carers are more frequently informed about their children's attendance and what they can do to support better attendance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

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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	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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

Pupils are provided with a wide range of memorable experiences that build their personal and academic skills exceptionally well. Highly personalised arrangements ensure that pupils have opportunities that take account of their strengths and interests. Outstanding partnerships supplement the school's own resources so that pupils can access appropriate accredited courses, work experience and further education. This supports pupils' future economic well-being effectively.

Teachers often plan learning activities that are well matched to pupils' learning styles and levels of understanding. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson about perimeter, brief but purposeful use was made of an outdoor area so that pupils learned by doing as well as listening. Consequently, pupils were able to express their understanding that the concept meant measuring 'around the edge'. However, in some lessons, planning does not ensure that all pupils move on as quickly as possible in their learning.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and increasingly incorporate the use of new technology well into their lessons. They demonstrate well-developed questioning skills which allow them to evaluate pupils' progress accurately. Staff have developed skills in managing difficult and disruptive behaviour well. As a result, learning is rarely interrupted by the poor behaviour of individual pupils. Teaching assistants are often well deployed and

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help develop pupils' learning and progress well when working with small groups. Occasionally, during whole-class teaching, their impact on learning is reduced as they are not always sufficiently well directed to focus on supporting pupils with their learning.

Arrangements for promoting smooth and successful transition into the school are exemplary. Staff ensure that all new pupils are visited, irrespective of their location, so that anxiety is reduced at the time of transfer. New Year 7 pupils benefit from a video made by Year 11. Where appropriate, pupils are very well supported through transitions to mainstream schools. The school has extremely effective procedures to support its most vulnerable pupils. Work with other professionals, particularly in social and health services, ensures that pupils' well-being is routinely given priority. All staff demonstrate a very high level of care and support for pupils, especially when they are in crisis. One pupil echoed the views of many of his peers when he told an inspector, 'This school helps me better than my old school. It's wicked here!'

The school has good systems to promote attendance and reduce absence. For most pupils this helps to support above average attendance. However, the few pupils of primary age whose attendance is less regular than that of their peers do not have personalised targets or support for improvement. The promotion of good attendance is less visible around the school than, for example, good behaviour. Consequently, pupils, and their parents and carers, are less well informed about their attendance rates than the progress they are making in other areas.

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?

Under the dynamic and supportive leadership of the headteacher, leaders and managers at all levels have ensured that the quality of learning and progress has remained good through an extended period of change. Staff who were experienced in teaching pupils with moderate learning difficulties have adapted well to new challenges. There is a shared understanding of the direction the school is taking and all staff understand their role in securing further improvements.

The quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and progress are monitored regularly and accurately. However, areas for development are not routinely followed up during subsequent observations. The governing body is proactive in supporting the school. Regular visits are made to classrooms and productive partnerships are well established with school staff.

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Arrangements for ensuring that pupils are adequately safeguarded are good. Staff are trained regularly and recruitment procedures are robust. The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is good. School leaders have an accurate understanding of pupils' backgrounds. Pupils currently have limited opportunities to engage with others of similar age from different backgrounds, although the school has suitable plans to address this issue.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is evident in all aspects of the school's work, and it tackles discrimination well. Rigorous monitoring ensures that no group of pupils makes progress at a significantly different rate to others. Pupils usually have positive attitudes towards their peers and the school operates harmoniously on a day-to-day basis.

Support for parents and carers is outstanding. The school is proactive, through provision such as the parent support group, in ensuring that they are strongly engaged with their children's learning and the work of the school. Relationships are highly positive, including with those parents and carers whose previous experiences have led to disaffection and disengagement with the education process.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The very caring and supportive environment ensures that their behaviour and emotional development improves greatly. There is a strong emphasis on promoting social skills, for example, through a shared healthy breakfast of cereal, fruit, toast and milk each day. Staff sometimes do too much for the children, laying the table, pouring cereal and milk and clearing up for them rather than teaching them to do this for themselves and promoting independence. Behaviour is good and children relate well to staff and to each other.

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

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Learning is organised into a coherent curriculum which focuses well on securing improvement in all areas of learning through the Reception Year and into Years 1 and 2. There are good opportunities for learning across all the required areas. The class is led and managed well so that teaching assistants are well deployed and effective at supporting learning during both whole-class and small group work. Good use is made of regular observations to assess children's current development and needs. Planning utilises this information well to ensure that learning activities address the areas of greatest need.

Activities are imaginative and relevant. Teaching is engaging and children respond well to the calm and friendly staff. For example, children developed their knowledge and understanding of the world, language and creative skills through listening to a story from a big book. This was followed up by opportunities to role play life in a lighthouse, using a pulley to carry food between this and the lighthouse keeper's boat. The well-equipped and secure outdoor area is used very effectively. However, some opportunities to promote learning are missed because few words, letters or numbers are displayed here.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

An above average proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Their views of the school are overwhelmingly positive, particularly in respect of the outstanding way in which the school cares for their children. Many written comments made clear that their children were happy at school. Inspectors' judgements are consistent with these views. A few parents and carers expressed concern about the amount of progress their children made at school. Inspectors found that, while most pupils make progress at a similar rate, there is still some inconsistency in the quality of planning and delivery of lessons and there are a few occasions where pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. A few parents and carers indicated that the school did not help them to support their children's learning. Inspectors found that there are many opportunities for parents and carers to obtain this kind of information and support from staff, and judged the school's provision in this area to be outstanding.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bower Grove 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 102 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 205 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	73	25	25	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	83	81	18	18	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	65	64	32	31	2	2	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	65	64	29	28	4	4	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	81	79	19	19	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	67	66	29	28	3	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	65	64	34	33	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)	77	75	21	21	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	75	74	21	21	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	78	76	20	20	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	70	69	27	26	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	89	87	12	12	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	90	88	11	11	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.



6 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bower Grove School, Maidstone ME16 8NL

Thank you for being so keen to welcome us when we inspected your school recently. We were pleased to talk to you about your school and to see you enjoying your lessons. You told us that you feel very safe because the staff look after you very well. We agree that this is an outstanding feature of the school.

Your school is a good school. This means that your teachers plan lessons that are mostly interesting and challenging so that you learn and make progress well. The curriculum they offer you is outstanding because it helps you to learn about lots of different subjects as well as get better at the things you find most difficult. The school works closely with lots of other people so that you have all of the right opportunities to prepare you well for the future. You are right to be very proud of the work you do for the school and other people in your local community. Your enthusiasm for sport is helping to keep you very healthy.

We know that your teachers want your school to be even better. To help them focus on what they can do to achieve this, we have asked them to:

- improve the progress you make by planning lessons that give each of you the right level of challenge for your individual needs
- improve attendance for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2.

You can all help by trying your hardest to achieve the learning and attendance challenges your teachers set for you.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter Lead inspector

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