

The Bridge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103624
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376938
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	David Muir HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mustaqh Ahmed
Headteacher	Adrian Coleman
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors observed eight lessons and saw eight teachers. Meetings were held with: the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team; two groups of pupils; a member of the governing body; and a range of staff, including teachers and teaching assistants. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including reports from the local authority, policies and self-evaluation documents. They also analysed the questionnaires returned by 21 parents and carers.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work, looking in detail at a number of key areas.

- How accurate is the leadership's monitoring of pupils' progress across all key stages?
- How has the school managed its location on two sites and how does this affect the co-ordination of subjects across the school?
- How well does the curriculum meet the needs, interests and abilities of all pupils on both sites?
- How well does teaching meet the needs of all pupils, taking into account their special educational needs and/or disabilities?

Information about the school

The school is based on two sites, one in Sutton Coldfield and the other in Erdington, the result of a merger of two schools which took place over five years ago. Each site has an Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A large minority of pupils also have associated autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a majority are known to be eligible for free school meals. One of the sites has a residential unit which was inspected in the summer and was not part of this inspection. A separate report is available.

Pupils come from a wide catchment area across Birmingham and a large majority of pupils travel to school on local authority transport. The school has gained several awards including: The Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark; Healthy Schools status; Investors in People; and Financial Management Standards in School.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Bridge School is a satisfactory school. Pupils' outcomes, including achievement and personal development aspects such as those covered by the 'Every Child Matters' national agenda are good. The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is outstanding. Several areas of leadership and management are good, including the effectiveness of partnerships and how well the school engages parents and carers, while other areas are satisfactory. The school experienced difficulties in creating a united identity and staff team across its two sites and a majority of returned staff questionnaires reflect the view that this has a negative effect on leadership and management. Leaders had not taken sufficiently decisive action to remedy this while waiting for further clarification from the local authority regarding the review of special educational needs and/or disability provision in the area. While the headteacher has introduced some area responsibilities across the two sites, such as lead teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage, this has not yet become embedded in the school's work.

Pupils make good progress in their learning and personal development. This was seen in the quality of learning in lessons during the inspection. Teachers and teaching assistants collect evidence of learning during lessons and set targets for improvement according to the school's expectations and the pupils' starting points. Often, these targets are modified upwards to provide more challenge in lessons. Over time, the progress of individual pupils is monitored across a range of subjects and areas of personal development. Currently, the data collected is not used as effectively as it could be to monitor trends, over time, across the school or to measure the progress of different groups of pupils. Leaders are starting to implement systems to improve this, with regard to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Attendance is low and has been for several years, and the number of pupils who are regularly absent is high. This is mainly due to some pupils having time off school for illness, due to their medical conditions. The school works well with parents to encourage them to ensure that their children attend as regularly as possible. However, some families still take holidays in term time. The school has strong links with the wider community. It is well regarded in the local community and is often the focus of fund-raising activities by local organisations and businesses. Although the school has developed links, it does not evaluate the impact of these on the work of the school or within the wider community.

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The curriculum is satisfactory as it meets the needs of pupils and they are prepared for the next stage of their lives. However, the school does not sufficiently analyse the impact of the curriculum on all groups of pupils. As a result, the school is currently reviewing the curriculum and is considering developing it based on a thematic approach. The quality of teaching is good and some is outstanding. The outstanding teaching ensures that pupils make impressive gains in their learning through a range of exciting activities and opportunities to develop independent and collaborative learning skills. The support of teaching assistants is of a high quality as it is extremely well targeted. In the best examples, they provide valuable learning support throughout the lesson, as they know the pupils and their needs extremely well.

The leadership and management of teaching and learning are good on the separate sites. Despite this the school needs to develop the role of subject co-ordinators so that they can actively monitor the quality of teaching across the sites. The school's leaders have a broadly accurate view of where there are strengths in the school and where improvements are needed, although their judgments have erred on the slightly optimistic side. Leaders recognise the need to promote best practice across the whole school and are looking at ways to develop improved working practices between the two groups of staff. Members of the governing body play a satisfactory part in monitoring the work of the school. They have recently taken on some new members who are currently being trained to ensure that they are able to fulfil their roles effectively. Due to the evidence of obstacles to more effective improvements being implemented, largely due to the management across the two sites, the school demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum is reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils, and is relevant to them so that it continues to contribute to the raising of aspirations and expectations
 - the use of data is refined so that leaders can monitor groups of pupils and identify any trends or patterns of underperformance as early as possible
 - data is used to inform the next stage of learning for all pupils
 - further ways to improve the level of attendance in the school are investigated and implemented.
- Developing the school's identity as a single establishment with shared aims, ethos and philosophy by ensuring that:
 - communication between staff is improved across all areas of the school
 - all staff are involved in establishing a clear vision of how the school will

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- develop, be it on one site or two
- leaders are seen to be managers of the whole school and are available to both sites regularly and as needed, so that other staff are given time to undertake their own duties and develop their own areas
- systems for managing the school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, create opportunities for staff to work together, and develop a common understanding and common practice for the benefit of all pupils on both sites.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Due to the nature of the pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, attainment on entry in to the school is significantly below expectations for their age. The good learning and progress made by pupils in lessons, including those seen during the inspection, is the result of the good and sometimes outstanding teaching. The teaching seen during the inspection and the school's data support the judgement that pupils' progress over time and achievement are good. The school's records show that there is no difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils in the school, although the analysis of this area of the school's work is in its early days and no historical data is available.

The school is a warm and welcoming community and behaviour is good, although some pupils require significant amounts of one-to-one support due to their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils make significant gains in their engagement in learning and behaviour during lessons. In the best lessons, behaviour shows that pupils are fully engaged, excited and keen to contribute to their own learning. Pupils feel safe in the school and all parents and carers who returned a questionnaire agree. Pupils develop a sense of right and wrong, and successfully increase their awareness of themselves and, through increased opportunities for collaboration, their peers and others. The school is aware of the importance of developing the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of pupils and does this effectively through a well-planned series of activities, including visits to the local community and regular celebrations of festivals from many religions. A well focused programme of assemblies has a positive impact on the spiritual aspect of pupils' development.

Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles well. There is a high level of involvement in physical activities to promote healthy lifestyles, including the daily 'wake up, shake up' session. Meals and snacks provided by the school are healthy, including vegetarian options, and there is a good uptake of these by pupils. The school's promotion of basic skills, in particular communication among the pupils, helps them to develop skills well and these contribute well to their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	4
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Joint observations of lessons during the inspection confirmed that leaders have an accurate view of the quality of the teaching and learning they are observing and are aware of where there are strengths and where further development is needed. They are now in the process of developing procedures to share the best practice across the school. In the best lessons, support is extremely well focused and directed by the class teacher to allow it to be targeted effectively to increase learning. This was evident in a class of pupils with a very wide range of needs. While the teacher was working with some pupils to develop their National Curriculum level literacy skills, two teaching assistants were working with a group of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Their effective use of a sensory story, involving many multi-sensory prompts, engaged and excited the pupils and provided a clear focus on their expected learning. Language use is well targeted and pupils have their abilities and preferences respected, so that the best lessons are fully accessible and move learning on to an outstanding degree through the use of Makaton signs, symbols, objects of reference, switches and voice. The use of this range of communication methods allows teachers to provide pupils with feedback with regard to the quality of their work in a way that is fully accessible to them.

Although subject leaders are in place, they do not co-ordinate the quality of teaching in their areas across both sites. The curriculum is enhanced by regular visits to the local community, which link well to current topic areas. Examples of this are visits to the Birmingham Sea Life Centre and a garden centre to support the topics of

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 the expectations for the pupils’ age

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'animals' and 'plants' respectively. Visits to local shops to buy ingredients for cooking are also regular features, and pupils are welcomed and well-received by the local community on their visits. Communication and independence skills are a priority of the curriculum and are well developed as a result. The school has developed effective links with local schools which enable more joint working and opportunities for inclusive activities. There is a limited use of visitors to enhance the curriculum, although the local priest does help to deliver aspects of assemblies. The lack of collaborative working between the two sites also impacts on the quality and continuity of the curriculum throughout the school.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. They effectively promote pupils' good personal development, with particular strength in how well pupils are prepared for their times of transition, both in to the school and onwards to their next placements. This is achieved through home visits and induction days on entry to the school, visits to onward placements, and continuing support after they have left the school to ensure successful transition. In addition to strong partnerships with a range of outside agencies, the residential unit is well used for targeted support and for helping parents to cope with particular issues which their children may have, such as sleeping, toileting and eating. Parents greatly appreciate this support. Relationships with pupils' homes are also enhanced by the work of the home/school liaison teacher. Parents find that they have a listening ear to support them and also a wide range of input on particular issues which may be of concern to them, such as autism, signing, toilet-training among others. This has empowered parents and carers to develop confidence to manage problems more effectively and also gives them opportunities to network and meet other parents with similar concerns.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders are aware that a combination of circumstances around trying to develop a cohesive school on two sites has led to a lowering of morale among the staff, However, this has not impacted on the good quality of learning for pupils or their personal development and there is evidence of good and outstanding teaching across the school.

Managers monitor progress of individual pupils well and are developing assessment schemes so that pupils can be assessed closely and any risk of underachievement can be identified early and supported appropriately. Equality of opportunity is

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satisfactory. Although the school knows each pupil very well and monitors some groups of pupils, providing appropriate support when needed, this is not yet consistently applied nor is it robust enough to monitor trends over time. Leaders are currently developing procedures further to ensure that other groups are monitored equally. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. Its evaluation of the impact of its actions on the school and wider community lacks rigour.

Staff at all levels work hard to ensure that pupils receive a good level of education and care during their time in the school. Safeguarding procedures and policies, including child protection, are satisfactory and show that all adults working with pupils are appropriately recruited and vetted. The range of policies and procedures cover all aspects of child protection and safety, and the involvement of other agencies ensures that pupils are safe when in school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children’s learning journeys in the form of Records of Achievement over time demonstrate that they make satisfactory progress overall, although some make good progress. This is also reflected in the data collected by the management through the assessment procedures. The Early Years Foundation Stage department is aware of the need to improve its collection of evidence of the progress made by children who have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good on each site. Effective planning is diminished by the lack of opportunity for staff to collaborate in curriculum planning across the two sites. The curriculum is planned on a site-by-site basis to ensure that the required six areas of learning are provided effectively. The provision for outdoor

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learning has improved since the previous inspection and allows the classes on both sites to access an outdoor classroom to enhance their learning opportunities. Opportunities for active learning are developed throughout the year as children develop more independence and responsibility. Good use of external agencies provides good support for parents and carers, during their transition in to the department and at other times.

The department works effectively with other agencies, although department links between the two sites are minimal. Opportunities are provided for the external moderation of work. Children are also provided with opportunities for mainstream placements if this is appropriate for them.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Although only a minority of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, these were overwhelmingly positive. The responses reflected the findings of the inspection in many of the areas, especially with regard to pupils’ personal developments and their achievement. No concerns were raised about 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 The Bridge 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 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 62 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	57	8	38	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	57	9	43	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	13	62	7	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	52	9	43	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	62	7	33	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	11	52	9	43	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	48	9	43	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)	7	33	11	52	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	11	52	8	38	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	48	11	52	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	48	10	48	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	14	67	6	29	1	5	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



17 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Bridge School, Birmingham, B23 6DE

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you very much for making our visit extremely interesting and enjoyable. We found that the school is satisfactory overall. Many aspects of your personal development are good, including how safe you feel and how you adopt healthy lifestyles. Your behaviour and warm welcome made a positive impression on us. We also found that the care, guidance and support that you receive are outstanding. However, attendance is low and those of you who can should try to attend school more often. I know this is sometimes difficult because of hospital appointments, but the more you attend school, the more you will learn and progress in your work. The progress you make in your lessons is good and the teaching is also good. Your contribution to the school's work is good and is an important part of making it more successful.

We identified some areas of the school's work which need further improvement. I have asked the headteacher to find ways to overcome the difficulties of having two sites. I have asked the school to make sure that the information it collects about your progress is used more effectively to identify where you need more help in your learning. I have also asked the headteacher and staff to review what you are taught so that it meets your needs, abilities and interests better.

Once again, thank you very much for the time you spent with us during the visit and we would like to wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Muir
Her Majesty's Inspector

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