

The Brier School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103878
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	376986
Inspection dates	1–2 May 2012
Lead inspector	Alan Lemon

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	149
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Timmins
Headteacher	Russell Hinton
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2008
School address	Bromley Lane Kingswinford DY6 8QN
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Age group	4–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Alan Lemon

Additional Inspector

Rosemary Mackenzie

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Eighteen lessons were observed involving 16 teachers. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, representatives of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at important school documentation including its self evaluation, data on pupils' performance, school improvement plans, policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils. The inspection team scrutinised 72 questionnaires received from parents and carers along with questionnaires from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs. Pupils have moderate learning difficulties and in addition to these a significant number have an autism spectrum condition. An increasing number of pupils enter the school with severe learning and communication difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average.

The school shares a site with a mainstream primary and secondary school. Some pupils attend these schools for part of their education as well as other schools and college.

The school has held the Inclusion Mark since 2009. In May 2009 the headteacher was designated a National Leader in Education and the school gained National Support School status.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school as a result of leaders’ high expectations inspiring staff to work resolutely and ensure pupils’ outstanding achievement and the excellent promotion of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils learn at a rapid pace and achieve challenging targets. Whatever their starting points, they develop knowledge, skills and understanding systematically and very quickly. This prepares them very well for the future. In lessons and over time they make much more progress than expected particularly in improving communication, literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teachers set high expectations for pupils and are experts in supporting pupils learning. Assessment is used very effectively and gives sharp focus to planning pupils’ learning and support. Lessons are lively and interesting, allowing pupils to enjoy learning and be encouraged to work hard. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their independence, although on a few occasions these are not always used to the full.
- Pupils make considerable efforts to behave well, stay safe and encourage others to do likewise. Staff manage pupils’ behaviour expertly and plan carefully the management of challenging behaviour. They have very effectively encouraged pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour, in particular by getting them to agree rules and a code of conduct. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They settle down to work quickly, sustain concentration and work hard.
- Leaders are very sharply focused on raising achievement and they resolutely drive the improvement of the school’s provision. A comprehensive and accurate evaluation of pupils’ progress and teaching gives leaders a substantial capacity to develop staff as highly effective practitioners. The curriculum is finely tuned in providing the learning opportunities to meet the wide range of pupils’ needs. Well-developed partnerships with mainstream schools and colleges ensure

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pupils have the opportunities and challenges to achieve highly. Pupils are given a wealth of experiences which promote their self-confidence and positive regard for others. This ensures they leave school as extremely well-rounded individuals.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen the focus on the further promotion pupils' independence by:
 - auditing all the potential opportunities in lessons for independent learning
 - planning and approaching lessons in ways that give more scope for pupils to be active learners and take greater charge of their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils develop as very effective learners and make rapid progress, often from very low starting points. Right across the school, pupils express very positive attitudes to learning in response to the high expectations set by staff. Their progress is monitored very closely so that no pupil falls behind. The expectations set for each pupil are expertly adapted and reflect the different challenges of which they are capable. This means targets are appropriate and ambitiously aimed at stretching each pupil. Pupils' achievement of very challenging targets means that they are making much more progress than expected, which places the school in the top rank of similar schools. Parents and carers are extremely pleased with the progress their children are making.

Pupils adhere to well-defined routines which help them settle, pay attention and follow instructions. At the start of the day, the Reception children and Key Stage 1 pupils who work together are very competent in managing expectations for marking themselves present and engaging fully in early morning activities. They have learnt to enjoy working together and take full advantage of the well-planned opportunities to speak and listen to others and read their news from home. The skills of reading are learnt very effectively. In relation to the expectations for Early Years Foundation Stage even though children finish Reception well below average their progress is outstanding across all areas of learning as a result of highly effective provision for meeting their needs.

In Years 4 and 5, pupils link letters and sounds accurately, breaking longer words down and they often read these correctly. The meaning of familiar words is well developed and pupils in Years 1 and 2 put together pairs of words such as the 'green ball' or the 'soft toy'. Through intensive and expert support, pupils with severe communication difficulties learn to recognise and use a range signs and symbols, improving their capacity significantly to express themselves and make choices. Pupils

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improve their literacy skills and make substantial progress in reading and writing. Pupils read regularly by themselves and to staff. In Key Stage 4, students maintain their own reading record. They enjoy reading and discuss knowledgeably the plot and characters in stories. Writing is developed and thoroughly well consolidated over time.

Handwriting from an early stage is well formed and legible and progress is fast towards pupils writing sentences to express their thoughts and record information. Pupils' number skills are often exceptionally well developed and they use these very skilfully to solve problems. Year 2 and 3 pupils working together made up sums of money using different combinations of coins. They were very adept in counting in steps of two, five 10 and 20 to answer problems. A few students with an autism spectrum condition have a talent for mathematics and they take part in GCSE lessons in the adjacent secondary school and are achieving highly. More able students in Key Stage 4 follow GCSE and Entry Level courses in their strong subjects. Two students each recently attained five A*-C GCSE passes, studying between school, the secondary school and college. Over many years students leaving school at the end of Year 11 have gone onto college to pursue a variety of further education courses.

Quality of teaching

Teachers, their classroom assistants and support staff are highly expert in meeting the range of pupils' needs. Staff provide much reassurance and encouragement especially through the strong relationships they have with pupils. This gives pupils confidence and they emulate the values staff express in their willingness to cooperate, work hard and show high regard for others. They have established many very effective strategies and resources to support different pupils and promote their learning and progress. Their professional development is comprehensive, up-to-date and stays ahead of changing demands as pupils with new and different needs arrive. Staff know pupils well as a result of the very positive rapport they develop with them and through close contact with their parents, carers and the professionals involved. Scrutiny of questionnaires reveals that all parents and carers strongly agree their children are well taught.

Thorough assessment keeps teachers closely informed about each pupil and their progress. An outstanding information and communication technology lesson planned a variety of challenging work matching a wide range of abilities, creating enjoyable activities which most pupils managed independently. More-able pupils developed word-processing skills, keying letters quickly and accurately, whereas lower-attaining pupils programmed a robotic toy with a good amount of independence to move in the way they had planned. Teachers make conscious efforts to promote independence but sometimes leave students too passive in lessons by over-estimating the amount of teacher talk necessary, thus reducing their scope to be as active in learning as possible.

The large majority of lessons are taught in lively, enjoyable ways and their pace is very well adjusted to challenge pupils. Pupils with autism spectrum conditions were

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inspired and greatly encouraged to speak and listen by presenting the weather forecast in front of a large weather map. They scripted their report and presented this with great self-confidence using their geography knowledge to name cities, regions and mountains in the British Isles. The priority given to pupils learning to read is very evident across the school, in every classroom and in the additional support outside lessons. Book resources and their age-appropriateness are very good. Linking letters and sounds is taught expertly and pupils' intonation of sounds and the effectiveness of their use in reading words are rigorously checked and if necessary corrected in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is above average. Attitudes to learning are outstanding. At a very consistent level across the school, pupils settle quickly to work in all lessons, sustain concentration for good periods of time and take an interest in learning by contributing ideas and opinions. From the earliest stage they understand the high expectations staff set and value the warm supportive atmosphere emanating from this. They are included in deciding the best ways of promoting good behaviour and have agreed codes of conduct, rewards and sanctions appropriate to their age. As a result, pupils develop, and are seen to have, a strong sense of responsibility for their own behaviour. By example and through their calmness, they encourage others to behave well. The school is diligent in recording incidents of bullying which are very few. Pupils are content that they are not harassed in any way by others and this is reflected in parents' and carers' views. Pupils are taught about the different forms of bullying and recently the school has raised their awareness of the risks posed by the use of the internet and how to avoid these.

Pupils' behaviour is managed very effectively. Staff implement consistently clear strategies promoting a calm, orderly school. Pupils whose behaviour is challenging are thoroughly assessed and comprehensive plans to support them ensure they stay settled and happy. There are very few instances of staff having to intervene directly to manage disruption and as few instances of pupils needing to be reminded to behave well. Almost all parents and carers believe behaviour is good as do the great majority of pupils. Almost all pupils say they feel safe and the same proportion of parents and carers share this view.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders set high expectations. They have maintained the school's outstanding status by driving the improvement of provision very effectively, particularly by responding to the increasing complexity in pupils' disabilities and special educational needs. The school has a substantial capacity for on-going improvement which is very effectively supported by the contribution of the governing body, in particular their help in developing the school's financial strategy which has made possible improvements in information and communication technology resources. This is underpinned by their very accurate picture of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Leaders are resolute in developing teaching and closing any gaps in pupils'

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performance. Teaching is distinguished by the breadth of experience and expertise of staff. Their training is comprehensive and responsive to changes in pupils' needs. Performance management underpins the staff's strong ambition and encourages in staff a culture of professionalism and a cohesive teamwork. Determined leadership across the school achieves outstanding outcomes for individuals. The school is strongly committed to the well-being and success of all pupils. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust, equality is promoted resolutely and staff do not tolerate discrimination.

Partnerships with schools and colleges broaden the curriculum by ensuring pupils have all of the appropriate opportunities to learn and achieve. The curriculum overall is thoroughly well developed with opportunities for pupils to learn key skills and enjoy a wealth of experiences preparing them for the future. Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of their work and activities. The curriculum develops pupils' knowledge of the world and other cultures. Assemblies and religious education explore the beliefs and values of world religions. The daily assemblies always include some hearty singing which uplifts pupils and raises their spirits enormously. The engagement with parents and carers and links with external agencies are well established in providing a very effective network of support.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



3 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Brier School, Kingswinford, DY6 8QN.

Thank you for the very warm welcome when we visited your school and many thanks also to the pupils we spoke to. Your school got top marks and it is an outstanding school.

These are some of its strongest features.

- You are making very fast progress in reading, writing and mathematics and over time your achievement is outstanding.
- Teaching is outstanding. You said you enjoy lessons and you were enjoying the ones we saw. Lessons are lively and your work is made interesting and fun. Activities are challenging and you have to use all of your ability to finish them. Often you are able to use your initiative in lessons and take charge of your learning but not in every lesson.
- You behave outstandingly well throughout the school day by managing your own behaviour very well, being co-operative, friendly and helpful.
- The headteacher and staff are very successful at improving the school and making sure you have the very best opportunities to learn, make progress and be well prepared for the future.

I have asked the headteacher to use all the opportunities there are in lessons for you to learn as independently as possible. You have the confidence and skills to make choices, take risks and work together free from the immediate control of your teacher. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon
Lead inspector

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