

The Brakenhale School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110047
Local authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	378041
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Christine Raeside HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1000
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Young
Headteacher	Paul Salter
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 February 2009
School address	Rectory Lane Bracknell RG12 7BA
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Christine Raeside

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Howe

Additional inspector

Juliet Jaggs

Additional inspector

Howard Jones

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons taught by 42 teachers, of which 8 were joint observations with members of the senior team. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to a number of lessons, sometimes accompanied by a senior leader. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students and school staff, including senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector held telephone discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and a school improvement adviser and took account of the responses to the online Parent View questionnaire in planning the inspection, although these were very few in number. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan. It also considered the school's arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of students. The team also analysed responses to inspection questionnaires completed by 138 parents and carers and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

The Brakenhale School is an average-sized school. The proportion of students known to eligible for free school meals is lower than average, at around 11%. Most students are White British, with around 16% from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion speak English as an additional language, with a few at the early stage of language acquisition. The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs at the school action plus stage of support is slightly lower than average. A slightly higher-than-average proportion have a statement of special educational needs. Both the main school and the sixth form have grown since the previous inspection, resulting in the roll almost doubling and in a significant increase in staffing. The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets the minimum standards for students' attainment and progress.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because the quality of teaching is uneven and achievement, although improving, is not yet good for all students or all subjects. Systems for driving improvement have successfully increased levels of attainment, but are not yet systematically and rigorously applied with equal effect across all aspects of the school's work. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results are improving rapidly as a result of a concerted focus since the previous inspection. Previous weaknesses, such as underachievement in English for boys and some lower ability students, are being effectively tackled, so that these groups are making gains on the average attainment of their peers nationally. Weaknesses remain, such as in science where a legacy of staffing turbulence and weaker teaching have resulted in some underachievement.
- Teaching is satisfactory, although there are examples of good and outstanding practice. However, lessons are not always well matched to students' learning needs. Teachers' capacity to adapt their practice to maintain good progress is variable, as is the quality of their questioning and of their feedback to students on how to improve their work.
- Students feel safe at school and their behaviour is satisfactory. The strongest teaching brings out their generally good attitudes to learning. Where teaching is weaker or teacher absence is covered by temporary staff, behaviour deteriorates and learning is sometimes interrupted.
- The rising attainment profile demonstrates school leaders' capacity to effect significant improvement. Systems to track students' outcomes are stronger than at the time of the previous inspection and have helped to identify underachievement and intervene to secure success. Strategies are in place to improve the quality of teaching and to tackle weaknesses in performance, but their impact has not yet been strong enough to secure good teaching overall. Systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the school's provision are not applied with equal rigour.
- The sixth form is satisfactory and sixth form teaching is a relative strength.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by increasing the proportion of teaching that is consistently good or better. Do this by ensuring that all teachers:
 - make effective use of assessment information to plan tasks and activities that are well matched to the full range of students' abilities
 - target questioning according to individual need and probe students' responses so that students develop and articulate their learning fully
 - make regular checks on understanding and adjust activities accordingly to ensure that pace and progress are maintained
 - provide regular and constructive feedback to students, both verbally and through marking, that enables them to move to the next stage of learning.
- Ensure that students' behaviour is equally good in all lessons, including those taught by temporary teachers, so that all learning proceeds without interruption.
- Sharpen systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the quality of the school's provision so that they drive accountability and secure improvement with equal rigour in all aspects of the school's work.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement overall, including in the sixth form, is satisfactory from starting points significantly lower than average in all year groups. Students learn most effectively when teachers involve them in their learning and give them opportunities to assess how they are doing. In a history lesson, students learning about the experience of evacuees used assessment criteria to help them aim their writing carefully towards their personal targets. The confidence and fluency of their writing increased as a result. In an English lesson, progress was good because the teacher's knowledge of individuals was evident in his feedback and in the way he asked questions. Students participated eagerly in their learning because the level of challenge was appropriate and sustained.

Following the previous inspection, GCSE results dipped to an unacceptably low level. School leaders have worked hard to improve levels of attainment. As a result, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher, including English and mathematics, in 2011, was the highest in the school's history and close to the national average. Given that students enter the school with attainment that is significantly lower than average, the rising achievement profile represents improving progress. Projections for 2012, based on reliable tracking systems and some examinations already taken, indicate further improvement. Boys' achievement, which has previously lagged behind girls', is improving rapidly, so that the gap is closing, although this trend is reversed in the sixth form, where boys do better than girls in both AS and A-level courses. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make broadly average progress overall, in line with their peers, but have also previously done less well in English. This, too, is an improving picture. Gaps between

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this cohort and their peers nationally are also closing and their achievement overall is satisfactory. Improvements in English are contributing to the development of students' basic literacy skills, which are generally low on entry. Attention to this area across the curriculum, for example through focusing on key vocabulary, is supportive. However, the impact of this is, as yet, variable. The great majority of parents and carers feel that their children are making good progress at school. Inspectors found progress to be improving, but not yet consistently good.

Quality of teaching

Students who met with inspectors were astute in their evaluation of teaching. They described how they make most progress in lessons where the teacher 'breaks the tasks down' and where the work is not 'all teacher-student directed'. They say that good teaching ensures they have an equal chance to participate and such lessons are enjoyable, engaging and encouraging. A sixth form drama lesson exemplified these qualities of good teaching: students were challenged throughout and most were meeting or exceeding stretching targets. Questioning was extended and probing, demonstrating high expectations. Students reflected on their own progress and also on the importance and value of exploring history.

Year 7 students in mathematics also worked towards individual targets, but broken into smaller steps to help them gain confidence with a subject they said they found difficult. The teaching was carefully planned to illustrate how algebraic equations work, through a simple game. Students overcame their fears and showed strengthening subject knowledge, using terms like 'inversion' and 'equation' accurately and explaining their use clearly. Where teaching is good or better it provides opportunities for students to reflect on the social and moral aspects of learning. For example, a drama lesson used powerful role play to create a scenario in which a phone had been stolen and wrongful accusations made.

Where teaching is no better than satisfactory it is because not enough account is taken of individual needs in the planning. A single task is sometimes set for all, so that the most able finish quickly whilst others struggle. Additional adults supporting disabled students or those with special educational needs know the students well as individuals, but they do not always challenge them sufficiently as learners. Occasionally, such support creates an unnecessary level of dependence so that the student makes progress beneath their capabilities. A targeted reading programme is in place to support students who enter the school with reading ages below their chronological ages. Despite some initial impact in raising reading ages for some students, evaluation shows variable rates of progress for others, so that its use remains under development.

Students' views of teaching, as expressed through the inspection questionnaire, are mixed. This is in accordance with the evaluation of teaching by inspectors and by senior leaders, who acknowledged inconsistencies. Parents and carers were more generous in their opinions, with the majority viewing teaching as good. However, several also commented that too much temporary staffing is having a destabilising

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influence. Inspectors agree, despite the fact that some good teaching by specialist cover teachers was observed. The school is fully staffed for September and senior staff are strongly aware of the imperative to provide stability and continuity.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the inspection students were friendly, polite and forthcoming in discussing their learning. Their conduct around the school was generally safe and calm. Many spoke to inspectors of how much behaviour has improved over time. They appreciate being consulted on matters such as the rewards system and, as a result, respond well to it. They were proud of their collection of tokens awarded for being 'caught doing the right thing' and look forward to claiming end-of-term rewards associated with these. They are well informed and understand about different types of bullying and have confidence in the school to deal quickly and effectively with any concerns that arise. They rightly view SEAL lessons, where they learn about the social and emotional aspects of learning, as effective in helping them to understand how to stay safe.

School systems for managing behaviour are effectively led. Students understand the consequences of infringing the behaviour policy and school records show that these are having a positive impact, for example by reducing the level of exclusions over time. Students generally behaved well in lessons observed during the inspection, although where teaching was less effective they were passive rather than actively involved. Several parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed concern about behaviour in lessons, especially where teacher absence is covered by temporary staff. Students agreed that, on these occasions, behaviour sometimes deteriorates. This compromises the impact of good behaviour and is an area for improvement.

Attendance is slightly lower than average overall, but improving for all groups of students. The proportion of students persistently absent from school remains slightly higher than average but is also decreasing as a result of actions taken and more effective partnership work in this area.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has worked effectively since the previous inspection to bring about essential improvements in attainment. Systems for evaluating progress data are greatly improved and well managed. The information they provide has been used to target intervention and intensive support to students at risk of falling behind, with a strong focus on Year 11 and English and mathematics. This has contributed to the narrowing of gaps between the achievement of different groups and national averages. Similarly, the tracking of attendance data has improved and is now more effectively focusing the school's strategies to reduce absence.

The curriculum has been appropriately developed to offer a range of pathways matching students' needs, abilities and interests. The sixth form curriculum is

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expanding as numbers increase and offers an appropriate mix of A-level and BTEC courses, with some wider choice available through consortium arrangements. An audit of whole-school literacy provision has been undertaken and the impact of this is emerging in some cross-curricular teaching of basic skills. Wider curriculum opportunities, such as sport and cultural visits, are highly valued by students. They are proud of the school's commitment to tackling discrimination, seen through the equality and diversity lessons which strongly promote mutual respect and understanding, as well as through the evening out of achievement between different groups. The specific focus of the equality and diversity lessons, and of the SEAL programme, has a satisfactory impact on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of learning. The best lessons consolidate this by fostering a deeper understanding of effective learning, for example through collaboration, self-motivation and peer support.

Governors support senior leaders and have effectively challenged them to raise standards of attainment. Reports to governors on the quality of provision and its evaluation are regular but not always challenged and probed with sufficient rigour. Although one or two specific concerns about students' well-being were raised by parents and carers and investigated, the inspection team found that arrangements for the safeguarding of students are appropriate and meet statutory requirements.

Middle leaders are wholly committed to improving outcomes for students. The growing culture of data analysis is helping to develop their capacity to drive improvement. Senior and middle leaders have a strong collective commitment to school improvement, which they communicate to staff well. However, systems for the evaluation, review and management of performance are not fully coherent or rigorous, so that their influence on the quality of teaching and progress is less strong than on final attainment outcomes.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	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 2010 to 31 August 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.
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.

29 June 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of The Brakenhale School, Bracknell RG12 7BA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently and for sharing your views about your learning, either in discussion or by completing the inspection questionnaire.

Your school is satisfactory. Since it was previously inspected, GCSE examination results have improved significantly. You are very appreciative of the measures taken to achieve this, for example the wide range of revision opportunities like 'night club' sessions, to ensure that you meet your target grades. Gaps in achievement between different groups, for example between boys and girls, are much narrower than they used to be because rates of progress are improving. Achievement overall, including in the sixth form, is now satisfactory.

You were very clear when you spoke to us about which lessons help you to make the best progress. We agree with you that it is important that you are involved in your learning and in assessing your own progress. There are some good examples of this, especially in the sixth form. You do less well when teachers set a single task for everyone, do not challenge you enough through questioning and feedback, or do not check often enough to make sure everyone has understood. We have asked your senior teachers to make sure that all teaching does these things consistently. You can help by getting fully involved in your learning in every lesson.

Your behaviour towards us was polite and courteous. Thank you especially to those of you who welcomed us formally into lessons. You and your parents and carers feel generally that behaviour around school is better than in the past and school records support this. However, you also told us that behaviour in lessons suffers when a teacher is away. More consistent staffing will help this situation, but we have also asked your senior teachers to ensure that behaviour is always good, no matter who is taking the lesson. It is also up to you to make sure this is the case, by showing the highly positive attitudes to learning that we witnessed in every lesson, irrespective of how well you know the teacher.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

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