

The Bridge School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124909
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	381006
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2012
Lead inspector	Pauline Hilling-Smith

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	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Cochrane
Headteacher	Odran Doran
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2009
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Age group	3-16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Pauline Hilling-Smith

Additional Inspector

Christopher Christofides

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 13 lessons taught by 13 teachers. Meetings were held with parents, governors and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's evaluation of its own performance, improvement planning documents, minutes of governors meetings and the responses to 34 parental questionnaires.

Information about the school

The Bridge School was established in September 2010 as a result of the amalgamation of Heathside School (primary phase) and Belstead School (secondary phase). The headteacher of the primary school took over as headteacher of the new school. At this point, the sixth form was relocated to a newly opened sixth form elsewhere and the new school does not cater for pupils beyond the age of 16. A new deputy headteacher at the primary campus was appointed in September 2011. The school is located on the two original school sites which are nine miles apart. The needs of pupils who attend the secondary phase have changed and these are now more complex. The school provides outreach support for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders who are on dual placements in mainstream schools in the local authority. The vast majority of the pupils have severe or profound learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The large majority of pupils are of primary age. The majority of pupils are boys and White British, but a small minority come from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The school has also achieved Healthy School status and gained a Singalong award.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school because the vast majority of pupils make good progress in their learning and personal development. It is not outstanding because the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good or better, and there are some inconsistencies in the application of procedures.
- Achievement is good. The vast majority of pupils enter the school with very underdeveloped skills in communication and with an inability to understand the world around them. They make good progress from their starting points and are able to make meaningful choices and communicate their wishes well by the time they leave.
- Teaching is good. Pupils work hard in lessons because expectations are high and planning for each pupil's individual learning need is carefully detailed. On a few occasions, plans made are not realised because pupils spend too long as part of a big group and do not have sufficient time to meet the targets set for them.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils try very hard to follow the guidance given to them by staff and they usually succeed. On a few occasions, no matter how hard they try, they cannot understand what they need to do and they become frustrated and display difficult behaviours. Although the staff usually manage such incidents well, occasionally they apply boundaries for acceptable behaviour inconsistently.
- Leadership and management are good. The governors and school leaders have steered the school well through a turbulent period of amalgamation and change. They have driven school improvement forward well because they manage performance well, and have a strong vision based on a clear understanding of what needs to be done and how it is going to be achieved. However, the middle leaders are not fully enough involved in the process.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching and learning is consistently good or better by:
 - sharing good practice
 - ensuring that the pace of pupils' learning is good throughout the lesson
 - ensuring that assessments made of pupils' learning are always sharply focused
 - developing the role of middle leaders so that they are involved in the monitoring of teaching and learning
 - systematically following through targets set to improve the quality of teaching swiftly
 - applying processes to manage behaviour consistently.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

When pupils enter the school, they are often at the very earliest stages of communication and numeracy and they cannot easily make sense of their environment. Well-planned procedures identify where the pupils are in their learning when they arrive at the school. From these starting points, pupils make good progress because they learn, through the use of signs, photographs and symbols, to express their needs and wishes and begin to understand the world around them. They are then able to begin to take advantage of the learning opportunities designed for them. In lessons and in other areas of the curriculum, pupils are expertly guided through carefully planned experiences and this enables them to make good progress in learning. By the time they leave school, the vast majority of pupils they can express their preferences and needs, and have some control over what happens in the environment.

Staff track pupils' progress well and in detail. The school checks the assessments it makes with staff from other schools locally and regionally to make sure that the correct assessment levels are awarded to individual pupils. Targets are then set on an individual basis and reviewed twice each year. Records show that all groups of pupils make good progress and narrow the gap between themselves and their peers. This information is analysed and used to plan transition to the next class and to identify the most appropriate placement after leaving school. It is also used to identify any pupil at anytime for whom a move to another special or mainstream school is appropriate. However, there is some inconsistency in recording progress towards targets set and sometimes there is a lack of precision, which means that progress is slowed because it leads to unnecessary repetition. Assessments made in lessons are sometimes not clearly focused on success criteria and this limits their value in planning the next steps in pupils' learning.

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were

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very positive about their children's achievement. A very few pupils were able to make the thumbs up sign when asked if they were doing well.

Quality of teaching

The majority of teaching observed during the inspection, and over time, is good. Sometimes it is outstanding and occasionally satisfactory. However, teaching is not yet consistently good or better and sometimes the quality of teaching is variable within a lesson. The best teaching is characterised by a good pace of learning because the learning opportunities planned for individuals are covered in the time available. Pupils are often engaged in their learning for long periods of time. They can see the positive consequences of the task they have completed and experience the joy of learning.

In one outstanding lesson, pupils made a journey to the seaside through the senses. They focused on photographs of themselves, taken when they had made a real life visit to the seaside, on a big screen. They anticipated what was going to happen as they listened to jolly music and to the staff sing while they moved to the beat. They were well supported by staff to dip their feet in dry sand first and then wet sand. They smelled the seaweed and then individuals chose to spend more time exploring it or to move on or back to other media. Pupils were able to choose a response by selecting the appropriate switch.

Learning through information communication technology (ICT) is a particular strength in the secondary phase. Detailed on-going assessments of what each pupil can do are used exceptionally effectively to identify exactly which programme will have the greatest impact on learning. In the primary phase nursery, a rich learning environment in which skilful adults extend children's language and thought is highly effective. The entitlements of early years education and specialist needs come together and have a big impact on beginning learners.

The more satisfactory learning takes place when pupils stay in large groups for too long and they spend too long waiting for their peers to respond. During this time, pupils become frustrated and restless or disengaged because it is not clear what they should be doing. Very occasionally, behaviour becomes extreme and disrupts learning for other pupils in the class. On these occasions, the impact of teaching on learning is only satisfactory.

Schemes of work are personalised for each pupil to ensure that individual communication and numeracy skills are prioritised. They build carefully on prior learning and build knowledge and skills effectively. In Key Stage 4, they build to an increasing number of external accreditations. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that teaching was good. Pupils were observed to enjoy lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Over the time the pupils attend the school they make good progress in the self-

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control of their behaviour. This is because individual programmes enable pupils to understand what is required of them. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and conduct in lessons is usually good. Support staff are patient and skilful in the way in which they de-escalate potential inappropriate behaviour or prompt pupils to modify their behaviour. Policies and procedures to manage confusion or frustration usually impact well on pupils' behaviour. On rare occasions when they are not applied consistently, the behaviour of an individual becomes extreme and may interrupt the learning of other pupils. When this happens detailed records are kept and these are analysed carefully to identify what may have triggered the behaviour. Changes to what is provided are then made to minimise the chances of it occurring again.

Care is always taken to ensure that pupils are kept safe and treated with respect and dignity. Pupils were unable to comment about bullying but there are no indications that it is any issue at all. A small but significant number of parents or carers declined to answer the questions about behaviour in the questionnaire because they felt that it could not apply in the context of the school. Attendance is good overall though there is some absence due to medical reasons.

Leadership and management

Since amalgamation, the school has experienced considerable turbulence as a result of staffing changes, a changing population in terms of numbers and complexity of need, and the anticipation of moving together into a new building which did not happen. The headteacher has driven the school forward resiliently and steered the school unwaveringly through this period. He has been well supported in this by a good governing body which adds considerable expertise, support and challenge to the leadership of the school. He has been ably supported by members of the senior leadership team, although the full complement of this team has only consolidated recently. A strong clear vision has been kept in place and although morale has dipped from time-to-time, this has been identified and managed proactively.

The school evaluates itself well and plans for improvement are effective. Strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies add well to the health and well-being needs of the pupils. The school contributes to the provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in both local special and mainstream schools. Aided by the local authority, the school and representatives of the governing body have evaluated and improved the curriculum in light of the changing needs of the pupil population so that it meets pupils' needs well. This work is still in progress and now sustained by the school because it has the capacity to improve from within the school. Priority is given at all times to equality of opportunity, and the social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimension of activities is well attended to at every opportunity.

The good work of the after-school club supports the curriculum and contributes well to pupils' learning and well-being. Pupils' achievement has remained good over the period of the transition to the new school because the team approach has minimised the impact of disruption by staff changes. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has been carried out regularly. However, on some occasions targets set to

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improve performance not been swiftly enough followed through and this has sometimes minimised the impact of the process. Safeguarding requirements are robust and meet statutory requirements.

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.



16 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Bridge School, Ipswich IP4 5SN

Thank you for making us welcome and letting us watch you in lessons and around school when we came to visit recently.

We could see that you felt safe and happy and found that you make good progress in lessons. Your parents and carers thought this too. We saw many examples of you working hard and, over time, learning how to confidently express your preferences and needs. Teaching is good and staff look after you well. You behave well and attend well.

The Bridge is a good school and I have used the sign you are familiar with to say this to you.



The school is well led and the many changes that have taken place during the past two years have been carefully managed. We think that you will make even better progress in lessons if the staff all share the things they do best and the headteacher makes plans for this to happen. We have asked them to do this. You can help by coming to school as often as you can and doing your very best at all times.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Hilling-Smith
Lead inspector

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