

Bracken Hill School

Chartwell Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottingham, NG17 7HZ

Inspection dates 3–4 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students are well prepared for the next stage in their education or training. They gain a wide range of qualifications before they leave school.
- Progress in personal development for the vast majority of students is good and occasionally outstanding.
- Students develop life skills well and become increasingly able to take responsibility for making their own choices in life.
- The majority of students make good progress in communication and reading.
- Students' skills are carefully assessed when they first start school to find out what they need to learn next.
- Teachers plan experiences that students find interesting and enjoyable.
- Students behave well and are keen to engage in conversation. Bullying is rare and students feel very safe and secure.
- Partnership with parents and families makes a good contribution to students' achievement
- The curriculum meets students' needs well. It is rich and varied and includes after-school and residential experiences.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school and is well supported by the deputy headteacher and governing body. As a leadership team they have had a good impact on the achievement of students by changing and extending the curriculum and through partnership with Derby University in the training of teachers on site.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of students do not always achieve as much as they could in writing and mathematics.
- The school does not make full use of information about progress nationally when considering how well students are doing.
- Teachers' targets and training are not always focused closely enough on improving learning in classrooms.
- The governing body is not kept fully informed about the effect of training on teaching, and middle leaders are not fully involved in checking the quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors took account of the school's self-evaluation and looked at the development plan, minutes of meetings, records of lesson observations, targets set for teachers, and students' progress tracking documents.
- The inspectors visited 14 lessons, held discussions with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a member of the local authority.
- The inspectors spoke to students and five parents, looked at school surveys of the views of students and parents, and took account of nine responses to Parent View.

Inspection team

Pauline Hilling-Smith, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rosemary Mackenzie	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Almost all students at Bracken Hill have either moderate or severe learning difficulties. A small minority have behavioural difficulties and a minority have additional complex communication difficulties.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of students are of White British origin.
- The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average.
- The majority of students are eligible for the pupil premium.
- A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2011.
- The school has achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark and has Investors in People status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve individual students' progress in writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that each student knows exactly what is to be achieved in each lesson
 - ensuring that support staff always know what they need to do to encourage each student to achieve their individual lesson target
 - limiting time spent in lessons on working in a big group on the same target
 - using marking consistently to identify what each student needs to do next to improve.
- Increase the amount of good or better teaching by:
 - extending the role of middle leaders in evaluating the quality of teaching
 - comparing the progress students make with a wider range of information available about the progress of students nationally with the same starting points
 - ensuring that training is always focused on the targets set for teachers in improving learning in classrooms
 - giving the governing body more information on the impact of training on raising the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Almost all the students are working below national expectations when they start at the school because of their disabilities and special educational needs. The vast majority of students make good progress from their starting points when compared with students nationally. A small minority attain accreditation at pre-GCSE level.
- Students' good and sometimes outstanding progress in personal development and life skills includes exercising as much choice as possible about what they do when they leave school.
- Progress in communication and reading are good because they are practised throughout the day and applied well in other subjects. This means that students develop confidence and enjoy reading and communicating with their peers and adults alike.
- Progress in writing and mathematics is slower because they spend less time working on their own individual target with a member of staff and more time working on a more general class target which does not meet their needs as closely.
- There is no difference between the overall progress of any groups of students. This includes students with moderate or severe learning difficulties, students of minority ethnic heritage, those eligible for additional funds from the pupil premium, those with behavioural difficulties and those who have additional complex communication difficulties. Additional funds are allocated to interventions to ensure good progress on an individual basis depending upon the needs of the student. For example, a student may spend more time than they would otherwise have been able to in the nurture group, which has a high number of skilled staff.
- Pupils' attainment is carefully assessed when they start the school. This shows what they can do and what they need to do next. The school sets each student learning targets in English, mathematics, science and personal development, and meticulously notes progress on the school's tracking documents.
- Student's progress is reviewed each term. If any student is identified as being at risk of not achieving their target, action is taken to ensure that this does not happen. However, progress towards targets is not always as swift as it could be because students do not always have a clear individual learning target in every lesson.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching over time is good and, at times, it is outstanding. Teaching enables most students to make good progress and a few to make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Students make good progress in lessons when they and support staff are very clear about what is to be achieved by each member of the class. For example, in an English lesson one student extended his communication very well when he exchanged a symbol for an object and then went on to sign and begin to say the name of the object.
- Teachers effectively support improvement in students' reading skills by systematically teaching the linking of sounds to letters, and staff often share and enjoy reading books with a student. Good progress in communication is promoted because staff are skilful in teaching

signed communication and communication using a symbolic system.

- Students enjoy lessons, especially when they are involved in practical activities such as cooking, gardening or learning how to take care of themselves. For example, in one lesson, students learned how different shoes might affect the health of their feet.
- Feedback from staff to students in lessons is good. As lessons proceed, students receive detailed information and prompts about what they need to do to improve. However, marking is not always as informative.
- Sometimes students spend too much time working in a big group listening to the teacher and their attention wanders. This means that learning does not progress as fast as it could.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are friendly and polite and behave well most of the time. They have good attitudes to learning and this helps them to learn well and make good progress.
- Students show that they care about each other because they make sure that adults know what their friends mean if there is any confusion. They are keen to share with everyone fruit or items they have cooked.
- Staff understand the needs of individuals well and are skilled in maintaining a good working atmosphere at all times. They observe students' behaviour diligently and encourage or provide additional advice about what the student needs to do. For example, one class delayed their move to the computer suite slightly to allow a student to feel calm about changing spaces.
- Students learn some valuable skills to keep themselves safe. They find out how to avoid being involved in road accidents when they are out in the community. They know that dogs should not be let off the lead in a busy high street. They know that they must consider their own actions carefully and use their self-control at all times.
- Students feel very safe and well cared for. The vast majority of parents agree with students that bullying is rare and that any issues are dealt with effectively. Students are helped to understand the different types of bullying through individual and group discussion.
- Each year a few students are able to concentrate on understanding their feelings when they spend time working in a small group with very skilled staff. This enables them to feel safe and secure because they know how to deal with stress or grief.
- Parents are very pleased with the progress their children make in life skills. However, students are not always given enough opportunity to apply these skills independently in lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher drives the school forward at a fast pace. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well together. They are ambitious for the achievement of the students and

are successful in driving improvements. However, comparing students' progress with a wider range of information available about the progress of students nationally with the same starting point is not fully refined.

- The staff support each other well. The full staff team is warm and committed to the achievement of the students. They ensure that any additional resources allocated for individual pupils are used to good effect; such as additional time with an individual member of staff to overcome any issues identified through careful assessment.
 - The school evaluates itself accurately. Plans made for improvement are effective because everyone contributes to them. Sometimes, however, targets are not as sharply focused as they should to be and middle leaders are not yet fully involved in how to improve learning in classrooms.
 - The curriculum meets the needs of the students well. It includes many outdoor pursuits, vocational activities such as gardening, and exciting opportunities such as a visit to the Paralympics. This means that students appreciate nature and begin to understand how difficult it is for disabled people to get as close to nature as they themselves can. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good.
 - The local authority provides light touch support by allocating an improvement partner to work with the school. This has helped the governing body, for example, to understand in detail how and why students behave well.
 - Partnership with parents contributes significantly to the achievement of the students. The experienced and highly skilled community liaison officer ensures that students and their families receive the best support when making decisions about the student's future.
 - Targets set for teachers have a good effect on school improvement. However development plans and training are not as yet as closely matched to improving learning in classrooms as they need to be.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - is led by a very effective Chair of the Governing Body who also leads a group of governing bodies of a number of other special schools
 - gives priority to parent and community representatives
 - provides good financial and resources management, and ensures that the pupil premium is allocated appropriately
 - does not yet seek sufficient information about the effect of training on improving the quality of teaching
 - ensures that all statutory duties including safeguarding are met.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122961
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	402120

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	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eric Ashby
Headteacher	Ron McCrossen
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2009
Telephone number	01623 477268
Fax number	01623 477298
Email address	office@brackenhill.notts.sch.uk

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