

Brambles East School

Woodlands, Holly Tree Close, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 2LQ

Inspection dates

24–26 September 2013

Overall effectiveness

Good

2

Pupils' achievement

Good

2

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

2

Quality of teaching

Good

2

Quality of curriculum

Good

2

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

1

Leadership and management

Good

2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Students make good progress as teaching and the curriculum are good.
- Students make good progress in English and outstanding progress in mathematics as a result of strong support from teachers and other adults inside and outside the classroom.
- Senior leaders and staff ensure that students in need are re-connected to full-time education and adult life. As a result, they achieve success.
- The policies and procedures to ensure that students are well looked after and kept safe are very meticulous. Staff know their students exceptionally well.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have had a strong impact on the school in a short time. As a result, achievement and teaching are good and welfare, health and safety are outstanding. Students gain success which previously they have not achieved.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teaching is not yet consistently outstanding and a small amount is not yet good. Students are not always clear about their targets or how to improve to reach them.
- Students' progress in reading and writing is weaker for some students than in mathematics.
- Activities do not always provide sufficient opportunities for students to work by themselves and to develop team-building skills.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This school was inspected with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed parts of seven lessons taught by five different teachers. Also, there was a jointly led 'learning walk' with the headteacher. The inspector also listened to students read, looked at students' work, and held meetings with senior leaders, the proprietor, staff and students.
- The school's documentation was examined, including policies, schemes of work, teachers' planning, assessment of students' attainment and progress and the school's own checks on the quality of teaching.
- There were two views of parents and carers registered on Ofsted's on-line questionnaire 'Parent View', but the inspector also looked at the school's own survey with parents and carers and there was one written response. 12 staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Zahid Aziz, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Brambles East is a small independent day special school located in Darwen, in the Borough of Blackburn with Darwen. It opened in October 2012 and is registered for up to 56 boys aged from 10 to 16 years. The school is run by Beechkeys Limited who also operate two other schools.
- There are currently 15 full-time students on roll in Years 7 to 10. All of the students have a statement of special educational needs for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and none is disabled. They are placed and funded by local authorities from the North West of England.
- The school is based in an old Victorian Grade 2 listed building that was last used as an elderly people's home. The proprietor has refurbished and decorated the building.
- The school's aims include: 'to re-engage disaffected youngsters in the life and routines of school, improve attendance and develop positive, socially adjusted young men who can successfully integrate into society and lead productive, purposeful lives'. The school has no particular religious affiliation.
- The school uses an off-site alternative provision for physical education and some sports activities.
- This is the school's first full inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Swiftly improve the quality of teaching so that all is good or outstanding by:
 - making sure that examples of outstanding teaching are shared among all staff
 - ensuring that marking is of a consistent quality across the school with guidance so that students know their targets and how to improve their work to achieve them.
- Accelerate students' progress in reading and writing, so that it at least matches that in mathematics by making sure that:
 - students have more opportunities to apply their writing skills across the curriculum
 - they are provided with further chances to improve their reading skills.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - making more regular checks on teachers' marking and their written comments in students' work folders
 - ensuring there are a wide range of activities that will develop students' independent learning and team-building skills.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

From low starting points, students' achievements are good and sometimes outstanding due to good teaching and a good curriculum. Students achieve success because staff know them well. All students have significant gaps in their learning when they start. Teachers plan most of the work at appropriate levels in order to get each student to where they should be. Despite their good progress, the levels which students reach, when compared with national expectations, remain low for their age. Students in Key Stage 3 make better progress than older students in Key Stage 4, who often come to the school with little previous experience or skills to support their academic development. Students have not yet taken any GCSE examinations.

In lessons, students often show that they can grasp the main concepts being studied. Teachers give sufficient opportunities for students to respond to questions and give their views, so that they develop their learning. One group of students successfully discussed various forms of senses from various descriptions. Students' speaking and listening skills are better than their reading and writing skills. Some students are more reluctant to read or write down their ideas at length or use these skills across different subjects. Their writing is not always of as high a standard as it should be, both in spelling and handwriting. Some students are confident when asked to read out loud and will tackle unfamiliar words. However, others are more reticent and not keen to read independently. Students make excellent progress in mathematics and gain confidence in arithmetical calculations using calculators and in other key areas, including shape, space and measures.

Students enjoy the different subjects they study and say that they learn more than in their previous schools. They trust their teachers and the teaching assistants who help them. This gain in confidence is a further key feature in enabling the students to make good progress.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Students' behaviour is good and their personal development is outstanding. The school has very clear procedures to support students' personal development which are applied consistently. The expectations of the school are very high. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, given students' starting points and often previous negative experiences of schooling.

On arrival, each student is provided with a detailed programme with a Behaviour Management Plan. As a result, behaviour improves very quickly. Attendance increases rapidly from very low levels, or non-attendance, at previous schools. As the school year progresses, there is a rapid drop in instances of serious disruptive behaviour. No lessons observed were adversely affected by students' poor behaviour or through serious non-compliance with requests from staff. Any potential issues were dealt quickly with before circumstances deteriorated. This means that students mostly remain engaged with their activities. The small group of students that met more formally with the inspector all stated that the school has helped them to overcome their previously poor behaviour or reluctance to attend school. Very few students expressed any concern about bullying and they state that the school does all it can to ensure that all students are safe and secure from any harm.

On the few occasions when students find it hard to manage their emotions and behaviour, staff manage this expertly. Staff have received training in dealing with aggressive behaviour and they support each other very well to ensure matters are under control quickly. This has successfully increased staff confidence. The approaches used help to calm potentially difficult situations. Activities such as reading at the start of each English lesson successfully help students to calm

down and engage in their study positively. This supports their social development and contributes to them showing more respectful behaviour both in and out of school.

Whole-school and well supervised activities such as assemblies and the daily break sessions give relaxed opportunities for students of all ages to mix and talk together. These help students to develop better social skills, which are required to operate effectively within a group. Students said that they mostly get on well with each other. The skills learnt, such as use of an electric drill and saw, make a very positive contribution to students' next steps and future adult responsibilities. These skills are further improved by taking on roles on the school council. The school is currently developing a range of activities which will provide additional chances to support the local community such as cleaning the local park and the cemetery.

Students are very aware of each other's different backgrounds and expressed the view that it was wrong to be small-minded and intolerant towards those who held different views, for example about religion. Recently, they visited a local mosque and tried exotic food and, as a result, these types of dishes are served in the canteen at the request of the school council. Students have access to newspapers at school to enable them to gain a better understanding of current affairs and to broaden their knowledge of local, national and international affairs. Senior leaders and staff are alert to ensuring that students receive balanced views on any political issues. Visits to places of interest such as science museums, places of worship and Blackpool zoo support the wider curriculum and contribute effectively to students' wider understanding of British society and its institutions, and of different cultures. Students are well prepared for life in a diverse and multicultural society.

Quality of teaching

Good

Teaching is mostly good and enables students to achieve well. Relationships between students and staff are very good. Students like their teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff. There is a high level of respect between all adults and students. This means that for most of the time, students are happy to engage with their work. This helps them to make good and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points. Staff are very consistent in the effective way that they manage students. All staff have high expectations. It is made clear to students that they go to lessons to learn and to achieve. Teachers listen carefully to their students and provide good opportunities for them to contribute their own ideas. This successfully helps students to become more involved in lessons and take part more willingly. This strongly supports students' self-esteem and self-confidence.

Lessons are mostly well planned, with tasks that are appropriate to the students' levels of understanding. There are good systems to assess and record students' progress. These give a detailed overview of how well students are doing. The information gathered is used effectively not only to plan each lesson but also to monitor progress over longer periods of time. Teachers regularly mark students' work and give comments on what has been successful. Teachers are less consistent at setting targets and making it clear to students what they must do to improve to achieve them. Consequently, progress is not always accelerated sufficiently, especially in English. The small classes mean that students have a great deal of individual and personalised attention. This is very effective in helping students overcome misconceptions and helps them make good progress.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good and helps students to learn and achieve well. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good and underpins the success of the school. Clear policies, good long-term plans and good quality schemes of work, lesson planning and allocated time for each subject mean

that students receive their full entitlement and cover all required areas of learning. The curriculum meets the needs of students because it ensures that they are able to work towards qualifications such as GCSE. This enables students to go on to further education courses when they leave and is successfully helping them to overcome any disadvantage due to their previous failure in learning. The school has plans to provide opportunities for vocational courses in the near future, for example in construction, motor vehicle maintenance and horticulture, in partnership with other educational providers to extend the range of qualifications available. The curriculum is not as effective in promoting outstanding learning because there are too few opportunities for students to extend their key skills such as writing in other subjects.

There is an appropriate emphasis on key subjects such as English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Opportunities to develop creativity are met through art, music and woodwork lessons. One student was observed developing skills in using a chisel to make a hole for joining together a wooden frame for the table whilst others were doing research on the internet to find responses to the question 'Are Ghosts Real?' These activities are effective in developing students' self-esteem and confidence. Suitable physical education takes place at a local sports centre. Effective enrichment activities involve fishing, a film club and art. There are strong links with the organisation's sister schools and the school has good links with outside agencies to support students' understanding of the world of work, career opportunities, their own place in society and their personal health and safety.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The provision for promoting students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. This and the efforts to develop students' personal skills are key factors in the success of the school. All the independent school regulations are met. There are very rigorous procedures for safeguarding students and for managing any matters to do with both child protection and the prevention of bullying. There are rigorous checks on the suitability of staff before they are appointed and all checks are duly recorded on a single central register as required. All staff have received training appropriate to their duties, including child protection, first aid and fire safety. Staff are confident in their knowledge about how to manage any issues related to safeguarding. There is a very systematic approach to ensuring that all mandatory training is undertaken. All required risk assessments have been completed, including those for the premises, fire safety and off-site visits. Routine checks on all aspects of fire safety equipment are completed within the required timescales. Students are extremely well supervised at all times. There is a very consistent approach in the way staff interact with students.

The proprietor, senior leaders and all staff are very alert to individual students' welfare needs. The school has excellent access to expertise in a wide range of areas, including clinical and therapeutic support. There are very good links with the placing local authorities and social services. This enables the school to provide an effective 'all-round' support which has a very positive impact on helping students gain some stability in their lives and return to full-time learning. The school has excellent links with parents and carers on a daily basis. Weekly reviews, take place run by senior staff and supported by an additional expert consultant, to discuss the needs of the most vulnerable students and carefully analyse how well students are progressing. Where there are any serious concerns, senior leaders and other staff develop short-term action plans to meet a student's specific needs when they arise. This ensures that students' welfare is constantly under review.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good and enable students to achieve well. School leaders are well supported by the proprietors who have a great deal of specialist expertise in student support. They have ensured that all regulations are met. There are very high expectations of staff and students.

The returned questionnaires from staff show that they have full confidence in the leadership and management of the school.

There is a strong and effective drive to ensure that students achieve success where they have previously failed and a strong commitment to helping students both academically and personally. The school's own survey of parents and carers shows that the majority hold positive views about its work. The school makes every effort to work with parents and carers on a daily basis as students are picked up and dropped off at home by the school staff. This liaison is successful in developing continuity of support between home and school and also improves attendance. The school provides all essential information through personal contact with parents and carers, the school prospectus or on the Internet.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have very successfully developed the provision for students' personal development and outstanding provision in welfare, health and safety. Despite improvements in teaching, leaders have not ensured that examples of outstanding teaching are shared among all staff and that students' work folders are monitored, especially for comments by teachers on how students are to improve their work. This means that while most students make good progress from their starting points, more could be making outstanding progress. There are too few opportunities for students to gain independent and team-building skills. Nevertheless, school leaders have demonstrated the capability to successfully tailor provision to meet individual needs and to ensure that achievement across the school is good. The premises and accommodation are well looked after and provide a very good environment for learning. The school's complaints procedures meet requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	138884
Inspection number	422839
DfE registration number	889/6013

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10–16 years
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beech Keys Limited
Chair	Gary Holiday
Headteacher	Mr John Rider
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,281
Telephone number	01254 706600
Fax number	N/A
Email address	reception@brambleseast.co.uk

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