

The Bridge School

Coppice View Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. B73 6UE

Inspection dates 21–22 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- The Bridge School provides a good standard of education for its pupils.
- The new senior leadership team has re-invigorated the school and has rightly targeted the improvement of teaching and achievement as a key priority. Consequently, both are good.
- The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher are highly effective and well regarded. They are leading the school forward with the full support of staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and the richness and diversity of school life are celebrated with pride.
- Pupils enjoy lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is good and they are safe because they are well looked after.
- Senior leaders, including governors, have established strong teamwork amongst staff. As a result, all are working towards common goals to the benefit of pupils' education.
- Staff work together well to provide lessons which engage pupils and help them to make good progress.
- Most pupils make good progress and some make outstanding progress. Pupils' progress is measured in very small steps, but represents good achievement for them.
- Pupils' have clear objectives to achieve, their progress is carefully recorded and this is one of the contributory factors for their good achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- The attendance for some pupils is too low and this negatively affects their progress, although there have been recent improvements.
- The arrangements for the current leadership and management of the school are very effective but these are not permanent.
- The split-site accommodation does not meet the needs of pupils well.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 10 lessons, seven of which were joint observations with the executive headteacher.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for an analysis to be provided. Inspectors examined the school’s recent survey of parents’ views.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school’s information on pupils’ progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Lawley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Bridge School was established following the amalgamation of two local primary special schools in September 2006 and is based on two sites, one in Sutton Coldfield and one in Erdington. There are firm plans for the school to be re-located on one site.
- The school educates children with complex and multiple needs, including severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and those diagnosed on the autistic spectrum disorder.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of pupils, in this case, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The Sutton site includes a residential unit for six weekly boarding pupils, term time only, which was last inspected in July 2013 and was not part of this inspection.
- Pupils come from a wide catchment area across Birmingham and a large majority of pupils travel to school on local authority transport.
- The make-up of the school reflects the ethnically diverse population it serves. The largest group of pupils are White British, but with significant numbers of Pakistani, and Bangladeshi pupils.
- The temporary executive headteacher is due to remain involved with the school until April 2014. The deputy headteacher took up her post in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding and so raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring lessons have more flair, creativity and imagination enabling the pace of learning to be quick enough to sustain pupils' attention
 - ensuring the work of support staff with pupils is consistently good
 - providing staff with coaching to improve their teaching
 - providing regular opportunities for teachers to observe outstanding practice.
- Continue to improve the attendance of some pupils to enable them to make better progress.
- Secure the long term future of the school by making permanent arrangements for its leadership and management as soon as possible.
- Work with the local authority to re-locate the school on one site as soon as possible, so that it is suitable to meet the needs of pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The school's assessment information shows that pupils make good progress, from low starting points over time. Inspection findings endorse this view. Achievement is good regardless of pupils' ethnic heritage. Approximately one third of pupils make outstanding progress. However, the poor attendance of some pupils limits their progress.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good all-round progress in all areas of learning. They are well prepared for their next class in Year 1 and they start to become more independent, in line with their abilities.
- Pupils make good gains in communication through the effective use of signs and symbols by staff and this helps pupils' understanding substantially. Many pupils use these methods to communicate their needs well, such as requesting preferred objects or activities. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties show increasing awareness and respond by eye contact and smiles.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well and in meaningful ways for pupils. Younger pupils use symbols or pictures to match words and letter sounds. More able pupils read simple story books and know some initial letter sounds to help them recognise words. They recognise numbers up to 10 and sort objects according to size, colour or patterns.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and are keen to participate in lessons which capture their attention, such as responding to lights, fans and sounds in the sensory room.
- Most support staff are used effectively to support pupils' learning. Often classes are divided into smaller groups to allow learning to be more precise and relevant to each pupil to ensure that tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities.
- Pupils' progress is tracked closely and all pupils, regardless of background, gender or ethnicity make equally good progress.
- The pupil premium funding has enabled the school to purchase more information and communication technology to help these pupils with their communication skills. It has also helped pupils to achieve their individual targets more rapidly and improve their progress, so that their progress is similar to that of other pupils in the school.
- Funding for primary school sports has enabled the school to provide extended swimming experiences for pupils. This has helped their confidence in the water and improved their physical well-being.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and staff establish positive and supportive relationships with pupils. The close knowledge staff have of pupils is used so that they can get the best out of them. For example, staff know the best physical positions for children to learn more effectively, such as in a standing frame or on the floor.
- Staff are skilled in using a range of sensory methods to engage pupils' attention. These can include using sand and water in a mathematics lesson or encouraging pupils to explore textures such as jelly with their hands.

- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It is lively and a wide range of stimulating experiences is offered to children. Staff are organised well so that there is a good mix of child-led and adult-led activities.
- Pupils' good attitudes to learning are promoted through teaching which encourages and supports them, so that their confidence and self esteem are boosted well and promote their personal and social development effectively.
- The use of alternative forms of communication, by staff, is well established and this does much to promote pupils' communication skills. In one assembly, excellent signing added a strong dimension to help pupils' understand the importance of good attendance at school.
- Where teaching is not outstanding, sometimes lessons lack sparkle, as the range of methods are not imaginative enough to capture pupils' often fleeting attention. Sometimes, the pace of activities is not quick enough, with some pupils having to wait too long for their turn. This lack of outstanding practice means that pupils, while making good progress, do not make outstanding progress.
- Support staff make a strong contribution to good teaching, although on occasions there is some variability in the quality of their work with groups of pupils.
- Teachers are good at setting very clear and specific learning objectives. This means that learning is very focused and meets the needs of individual pupils well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Parents feel positively about the school. One parent commented, 'My son loves being at school. His confidence has really grown. His progress is amazing in all areas.' and another commented, 'He has blossomed into the boy he is today thanks to staff in the school'.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils try hard to achieve, even when tasks are demanding. For example, one pupil had recently learned to take four independent steps in a physical education lesson, which took great effort. Pupils respond well to praise and encouragement.
- Supervision of pupils is good and every effort is made to ensure they are safe, whilst not over protecting them and denying opportunities to promote their independence. Bullying is not a problem, as for nearly all pupils, bullying is not in their nature and they are tolerant of one another.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy celebrating events and each others' achievements. The daily assemblies are positive and affirming opportunities for pupils, as well as times of fun and enjoyment. The drama club provides excellent opportunities for pupils to co-operate in simple drama games and activities.
- Some pupils have substantial behavioural difficulties when they begin but, over time, they make good improvements in their behaviour and become more accepting of routines and working with one another.
- Pupils' attendance is below average. Some pupils suffer from ill-health, but a few pupils do not attend as well as they should. The new senior leadership team has started to address this issue

by refusing holidays in term time and raising parental expectations. Early indications are that pupils' attendance is starting to improve but more needs to be done.

- The school council is used successfully to promote friendship across the school and to encourage pupils to take responsibility for others.

The leadership and management are good

- The new executive headteacher has brought about rapid improvements. Staff are enthusiastic about the changes and are keen to move forward. A member of staff accurately commented, 'The school has made dramatic progress and improvements. Improvements are happening at pace'.
- The new senior leadership team has made a positive impact upon the school and has robust plans to make the school outstanding. There is a clear drive to raise pupils' achievements further. However, the arrangements for a permanent solution to the leadership and management of the school are not yet agreed.
- The role of other leaders across the school is currently being reviewed to make the leadership and management more effective, particularly to meet the demands of the split site accommodation. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and this key stage is well led.
- Checking of the work of teachers and support staff has become more rigorous. Lesson observations have highlighted clearly the strengths in teaching and areas for improvement. The performance management of staff has identified ways in which teaching can be improved further through the use of coaching and observations of other outstanding teachers, although this has yet to be implemented.
- The accommodation is not well suited to pupils' needs. Some areas are cramped, and quiet areas for pupils to work individually are far from ideal, particularly at the Erdington site. The split-site provision has engendered the feeling of two schools, rather than one, although senior leaders have done much to improve morale recently.
- The subjects the school offers have been reviewed and changes made to ensure that the curriculum is wider and more interesting to better meet the needs of pupils. This, in turn, promotes positive attitudes to learning by them.
- The local authority has provided very effective support for the school and has brokered the current effective leadership and management arrangements.
- Additional sources of funding, such as the pupil premium and primary school sports funding, have been spent appropriately and have benefitted pupils' well-being and achievement.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body has been strengthened with a new Chair and some new members. The committees have been reviewed as well as the make-up of the governing body. Governors have an accurate view of the school and know that more outstanding teaching and better progress by pupils are priorities. They are committed and visit the school regularly to make sure they are well informed about its performance. Governors offer good levels of support and challenge to the leadership team. They have ensured there is a suitable link between pay and the quality of teaching.
- Governors have received safeguarding training and have a named safeguarding governor. They have enough information to help them know how well pupils across the school are achieving, including those who receive the pupil premium, and understand the impact of primary sports funding. They have worked effectively with the local authority in making strategic decisions regarding the accommodation and the leadership and management of the school. They are working closely with the new senior leadership team to reduce the amount of expenditure on staff-absence cover and good progress has been made on this, so that more money can be spent on resources for pupils.

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	103624
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	426903

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	2-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Gospel
Headteacher	Jane Edgerton
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2011
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