

# Pebble Brook School

Churchill Avenue, Aylesbury, HP21 8LZ

**Inspection dates** 27–28 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	<b>4</b>
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- At the heart of Pebble Brook's sustained and rapid improvement between successive monitoring inspections, is the determined leadership of the headteacher, his senior team and governors. A relentless focus on getting the best for the students with an exceptionally wide range of needs now ensures rapid progress for all groups, including post-16 students.
- The school has developed excellent information gathering and monitoring procedures to systematically check very frequently on students' achievements. Nothing less than good is acceptable.
- Imaginative learning pathways and signposts for each student are established when they join the school. This means that when they leave Pebble Brook, they are well prepared for the next stage of their training and education.
- Teaching is typically good with some outstanding. There are few pockets of classroom practice that do not meet the school's high expectations. Training is carefully targeted to help staff improve and its impact is equally rigorously checked.
- Students make excellent progress in developing their social skills. They behave well, supported sensitively by staff's very positive management of behaviour and by the concerned approach of all staff for students' welfare. They feel safe in school, are happy learning, and proud of their work. Their attendance is above average for both secondary and special schools.
- Partnerships with other local providers are good and students find the transition to work or training very smooth.
- Post-16 provision is good and is seen by the school, parents, carers and students as an integral part of the students' learning journey from when they join the school.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Despite the good and sometimes excellent teaching of basic skills in English and mathematics not all staff are fully skilled in enhancing students' writing and calculation skills in other subjects.
- Some teaching is not as well developed in managing smooth changes in lessons to support excellent learning.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited nine lessons, all jointly observed with senior leaders, and undertook two learning walks.
- Informal discussions were held with groups of students, as well as listening to students reading.
- There were no submissions to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors held discussion with parents and carers visiting the school.
- As this inspection began as a monitoring inspection, questionnaires were not circulated to staff. Their views were collected during conversations held during the course of the inspection.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher and other senior leaders and with the local authority’s link officer.
- Inspectors evaluated documentation, including information on the students’ current progress, the curriculum, development plans and procedures, and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The boarding provision is not integral to the school and was not considered as part of this inspection.
- When the school was inspected in May 2012, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently the school received three monitoring visits. On this fourth monitoring inspection, it was no longer deemed to require special measures.

## Inspection team

Sheila Nolan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Terence Cook

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.*

### Information about this school

- Pebble Brook School has doubled in size since the previous section 5 inspection. The groups of students for which it provides have also changed significantly. It now caters mainly for students with speech, language and communication needs, those with a diagnosis of autism, those with moderate learning needs and other complex needs, and increasingly for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties that cannot manage in mainstream schools. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The post-16 provision, started in September 2012, is now well established. Many students benefit from courses at Aylesbury College and from access to a wide range of other local providers as need arises.
- Around a third of the students are eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional funding provided by government for those students eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and those from service families). There are no students from service families in the school.
- The proportion of the students who are from ethnic minority groups is approximately a third of the school population. None are at the early stages of learning English although most speak English as an additional language. The remaining two thirds of students are of White British heritage. A number of students join the school throughout the academic year.
- As the school roll has expanded so has the number of staff. Six new teaching staff joined the school in September as did a number of additional support staff, including three who trained on the school's apprenticeship scheme for support staff.
- The headteacher took up his post shortly before the last section 5 inspection. The deputy headteacher took up his post as acting deputy headteacher just after the inspection and the assistant headteacher in charge of teaching joined the school earlier this year.
- Building works have been completed and improvements to the external environment are also finished.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the present typically good teaching improves still further by:
  - skilling up those staff who find it difficult to manage the smooth transitions between learning activities that are evident in the best lessons
  - making explicit in teachers' planning exactly what is expected of the assigned support staff so that they can help with picking up any misconceptions and misunderstandings.
- Place greater emphasis on encouraging all staff to provide well-considered opportunities for students to enhance and apply their growing literacy and numeracy skills in all curricular areas, including during the afternoon creative topic sessions.
- Continue the well-paced drive for even further improvement, given the changing nature of the school population so that all staff are well prepared for the widening range of need.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

**good**

- All students have starting points much lower than those expected nationally for their age groups. Reading ages and writing skills when students join the school are generally very low.
- Very rigorous information gathering on each student, coupled with meticulous two-weekly checks on their learning, have made for at least good progress for all groups of students.
- There has been an increasingly rapid rate of progress for all groups over the period of the monitoring visits and present records display clearly the high proportion of the students making at least good progress. This carefully moderated information demonstrates that the legacy of underachievement from prior to special measures has been effectively overcome.
- The school has an ambitious roadmap for each student, targeting the points they are expected to meet to gain the best outcomes possible. As a result of holding teachers robustly to account, progress has accelerated even more this term with all students from both P-levels and National Curriculum level starting points making at least solid progress in English and mathematics. Around 40% of students at Key Stage 3 are currently making good or better progress in English and mathematics.
- The picture is similar at Key Stage 4 for English and mathematics. The imaginative vocational and subject offer has empowered students to gain worthwhile external accreditation across a wide range, from sounds technology to cycle maintenance, childcare and information and communication technology. Those students who are able are provided with good opportunities to gain qualifications from Entry Level to GCSE.
- At Key Stage 5, students continue the upward trajectory to reach their targets. Some students are extending previous qualifications into GCSE examinations and striving to gain a grade C by 19 years of age.
- Students following off-site courses for part of their week also make good strides in learning. The school carefully tracks all aspects of their learning.
- All of these results are a significant improvement on previous trends in the school and demonstrate the school's now well-embedded very sharp focus on the students' academic progress as well as their personal development.
- Those students eligible for the pupil premium achieve their personal best as do their peers. Well-considered interventions, carefully evaluated against their intended outcomes, help these students to succeed and gain confidence where needed.
- Reading ages continue to show real progress, with students proud of their achievements. Parents and carers reported their delight when a student related how he was now able to read 'really big books' in Year 8 from previously very low reading levels.
- Progress in lessons is equally as good as that shown by the longer-term tracking information. Students take great pride in their work responding confidently to the careful sequencing of learning. Writing skills are improving but there remains variation in the rigour with which some subject areas outside of English and mathematics develop basic skills, including calculations, spelling and handwriting.

### The quality of teaching

**good**

- Teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection. The systematic drive to improve classroom practice over 18 months has empowered staff to deliver lessons that are mostly very well matched to the students' learning and personal needs. When staff practice is less than good, intensive training is set up, the impact of which is carefully monitored.
- Characteristic of all lessons are the very positive relationships between staff and students so that behaviour is managed at least well, even when there are challenging behaviour patterns. As a

result, students are very happy to settle to learning and engage well throughout the lesson.

- In an outstanding English lesson, the careful sequencing of learning and the building on earlier learning resulted in students gaining excellent insights into persuasive writing. The strong focus on basic literacy skills was evident in the extended writing seen in the students' workbooks. The mystery of the missing school gnome, for example, inspired some very imaginative responses, both oral and written, from across the range of students.
- Nevertheless, good practice in reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills is not always evident in all subject areas or between all staff. For example, in a science lesson, students' work in their books showed less care and attention to handwriting and spelling than that seen in English.
- Basic skills are also well developed in mathematics teaching. Years 8 and 9 students benefited from an emphasis on technical vocabulary and the opportunities to use the vocabulary in written work. Mathematics also supported students' learning well through realistic problem-solving situations, sometimes involving money, that encouraged independent learning and confidence.
- Most staff use resources well to help students understand the ideas shared in the lesson. In particular, they use new technologies well. Most plan very carefully to meet students' individual needs. However, there are still a few lessons where the pace of the lesson does not support the students and where they spend too long as passive learners rather than getting to grips with their tasks. This sometimes results in adults not having a sharp enough eye for misconceptions and misunderstandings. Support staff are occasionally not guided well enough as to what is expected of them in assessing the individual's learning.
- The transitions between activities in lessons are managed very well in the best classes. Nevertheless, despite good planning, a few staff do not yet have good enough class management skills to make the best of the careful sequencing of learning expected throughout the school.
- Students' personal development is very well promoted in lessons. Woven into all lessons are opportunities for students to communicate their learning, listen to each other, reflect on the impact of their actions on others and above all develop self-esteem and confidence. It is this growth in self-confidence that has changed the trajectory of students' learning, particularly since the last monitoring inspection. Students now believe they can succeed.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

**good**

- Behaviour and safety are typically good. On-going and recent training has empowered staff to manage students' behaviour very well. All are diligent in using the behaviour tracking system which allows the school to follow up any issues likely to arise. Staff give real assent to fully occupying students at the right levels so that they are neither bored or frustrated. As a result, exclusions of any kind are now unknown in the school.
- Students are happy to be at Pebble Brook. Parents and carers report the increased confidence of their children and the rapid improvements in their communication skills. This confidence is evident in the ease with which they greet visitors and the courtesy they show in simple tasks such as opening doors. Lunchtimes are real social occasions with staff sharing tables with students. There is good provision for those students who value a quiet break.
- Safeguarding procedures are very robust and students feel safe in school and in alternative provision. This is reflected in their good regular attendance which at 94% is well above the minimum expected for special schools. Major factors in the considerable improvements in attendance are the intervention programmes which carefully match personal and academic needs to steps taken.
- Students, at their own level, understand what bullying means and know right from wrong. The school works intensively with parents and carers to help them understand the risks the young people face in keeping safe and managing their own behaviour. The new vocational offer is having a very positive impact on students' and parents' perceptions of what school is about.

This is seen in the pride students display in their new-found reading skills and their ability to accept and respond to praise, rewards and sanctions. Students behave well in school because they are well supported. They are learning to manage their emotions and frustrations but are not always able to do this independently.

## The leadership and management

good

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher in charge of the development of teaching have been relentless in driving forward school improvement since taking up their posts. By laying solid foundations for school procedures they have been able to sustain a trajectory of school improvement. Robust action to deal with teaching and other practice that was not good enough, along with judicious recruitment of staff, excellent progress tracking data, and an imaginative curriculum, have allowed for a sharp acceleration of provision and outcomes for students in the period since the last monitoring inspection.
- Staff appointed in recent months have brought new life to the school and have energised existing staff to make good gains in their work. A committed team of middle leaders are rapidly developing their skills well. Remuneration for staff, linked to students' performance, is helping to sort out effectively any issues where staff are not perceived to be of a high enough standard. Some subject leaders have joined the school recently and demonstrate a genuine willingness to join the ambitious drive for improvement.
- Pebble Brook tackles discrimination well. It seeks the best for its students in all settings whatever their challenges. The regular checking of progress means that there is good attention to ensuring equality of opportunity in both personal and academic development. The robust monitoring of the information ensures that any underachievement is picked up rapidly.
- A key feature of the very strong senior leadership is the way the students' best possible outcomes are signposted and pathways set from entry to the school to the end of Key Stage 5. This has raised staff's expectations as well as students' and their parents' and carers' aspirations. Interventions to keep students on the pathway are perceived as positive by all concerned.
- Systematic approaches to alternative provision and work-related activities have strengthened the school's offer to the pupils and broadened experiences for the students. As a result the preparation for the next stage of training and education is much improved on that previously. Some students have already secured apprenticeships in their chosen fields. Links with families are strengthening as the school works determinedly in trying to involve parents and carers in the children's education.
- The previous very good support from the local authority has gradually been withdrawn. The school is now able to stand on its own feet. It has a good capacity to improve further and draws on local authority support no more than other good schools. There are still issues to be resolved around the budget deficit which has now been licensed and a deficit reduction plan is in place. The school has begun to share its excellent progress checking systems with other local schools.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The members of the governing body are very ably led by the Chair of the Governing Body who has an excellent grasp of what needs to be done to secure the school's improvement. Dogged perseverance over budget issues has led to real clarity about the deficit and the establishment of a reduction plan. Governors are well aware of how well the school is performing in relation to other special schools and in relation to all schools nationally. They know about the quality of individual staff and how this is related to remuneration for the headteacher and staff. They have a realistic assessment of students' progress and are able to ask searching questions of leaders and other staff. Governors know well the impact of spending on the pupil premium and of the Year 7 catch-up funding. Members are experienced in the processes of safer recruitment and the safeguarding of students is a high priority. Governors take part in regular training so that they are up to date with what is expected of them and of the school.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110576
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	423906

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	99
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	16
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	2
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Annie Andrews
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Miller
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3–4 May 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 415761
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