

The Brambles

159 Longmeanygate, Midge Hall, Leyland, PR26 7TB

Inspection dates	28–30 January 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Students achieve exceptionally well. All students arrive at the school with attainment levels that are well below average for their age. The vast majority thrive at the school. All those who left Year 11 in 2013 took up places at college.
- The school is highly successful in enabling students with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties to modify their behaviour. This means that they can concentrate on learning and develop positive relationships with staff and each other.
- The quality of teaching is consistently at least good and frequently outstanding. Staff are highly skilled at tailoring their teaching to students' individual needs, enabling them to make excellent progress.
- The curriculum has broadened significantly since the previous inspection. It balances extremely well the strong emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills with a wealth of other opportunities. The attention paid to developing students' personal skills ensures that the school operates as a calm, harmonious community.
- The outstanding care with which all staff promote students' welfare, health and safety lies at the heart of the school's success.
- Leadership and management of the highest quality mean that the school has successfully built on the many strengths it demonstrated at the previous inspection. It has doubled in size but maintained its all-important focus on helping each individual to succeed. Staff are very well trained, have high expectations and apply the school's procedures with admirable consistency. This creates an ethos in which all grow in self-confidence and self-esteem.

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 inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 10 part-lessons taught by nine teachers. She talked informally with students at recreation times, and spoke formally with students of all ages. The inspector held meetings with staff and the Chair of the Management Board.
- The inspector scrutinised students' work and a range of school documents. These included records of students' progress and attainment; schemes of work; school self-evaluation; policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). The inspector analysed responses to 21 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Sarah Drake, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Brambles is an independent day special school for boys aged between 11 and 16 years who have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. It opened in September 2009 and is one of three schools run by Beechkeys Limited. The school is registered to cater for up to 56 boys.
- Currently, there are 50 students on roll, of whom 49 have statements of special educational needs. The students are drawn from a wide geographical area and are placed at the school by seven different local authorities. Fourteen students are in the care of their local authority.
- The great majority of students are of White British heritage.
- There are eight classes, with no more than seven students in each. All students spend one day a week experiencing a range of outdoor adventurous activities at different sports centres. Older students have opportunities to pursue a range of vocational courses at college.
- The school aims to provide its students 'with an educational experience that will not only extend their academic, vocational and social skills and abilities, but will also promote personal growth and help to build self-esteem.'
- The school was last inspected in December 2010 when there were 22 students on roll.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' individual education plans so that they more clearly demonstrate individuals' progress towards their targets.
- Ensure that the marking of students' work is consistently of high quality so that students are clear about what they need to concentrate on next to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students achieve outstandingly well because the teaching is of high quality and the curriculum is exceptionally well adapted to meet their needs. All students arrive at The Brambles with significant gaps in and, often, negative attitudes towards learning. The care that staff offer them helps them to believe that they can achieve and provides them with the skills to do so. These potentially volatile students come to realise how much they do know, to have the confidence to notice and self-correct their mistakes, to sustain their concentration, and to work with care.

Students, some of whom when they join the school do not recognise all the letters of the alphabet, develop in to boys who enjoy reading and are willing to do so aloud. Their comprehension skills improve. Those who initially struggle to write short, simple sentences begin to write at greater length. After one term, a student confidently wrote one and a half pages, although not all the spelling was correct, about Sherlock Holmes' visit to London where he saw 'suspicious looking men'. More-able students automatically refer to the text in order to substantiate their thinking about the character of Mercutio in 'Romeo and Juliet'. In mathematics, the students progress from simple addition to calculating the circumference of a circle. Students also achieve well in art, as demonstrated by their sensitive pastels of sunsets and illustrations of flowers. They use information and communication technology for research and to produce spreadsheets or power-point presentations.

In 2013 in mathematics and English, almost half the Year 11 students gained GCSE grades and all students gained Entry Level 2 or 3. Between them, students also gained: Entry Level qualifications in science, humanities, and personal, social and health education; BTec Levels 1 or 2 in land-based studies, and art and design; and Level 1 qualifications in vehicle maintenance. All gained college places and all, to date, remain on their chosen courses. This represents outstanding achievement from their individual starting points.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

The school's very effective provision to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables them to grow in self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline. Initially, most students' behaviour is erratic and angry. Due to the school's very clear expectations and all staff members' consistent application of the rules and encouragement to students to 'get it right', their behaviour calms. Students make rapid gains in their attitudes to work and willingness to apply themselves to the task in hand. This means that lessons almost always run smoothly and that the school operates as an orderly community with a pleasant atmosphere in which good relationships abound and students behave outstandingly well. Students volunteer to help each other in lessons and openly talk about how their behaviour at home has also improved. They say that physical restraint is seldom used at the school, and only when necessary, 'because staff talk to children'; school records confirm this.

In the current year, almost half the students have attendance of 95% or more, and the attendance of well over half is above 90%. Students enjoy being at the school and say they would, 'rather be here than in mainstream.' Through lessons and the school's wider curriculum, they learn an appreciation and respect for their own and others' cultures, as well as a broad general knowledge of public services and institutions in England. Students fully include those of different ethnicity and ability in all activities.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

Teaching of consistently strong quality means that students are clear about the purpose of each

lesson and what it is that they are expected to do and to learn. The good rapport between adults and boys, including much use of humour, spurs the students to try hard. Staff are exceptionally skilled at managing students' behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants achieve an excellent balance between support and encouragement of independence, which means that students concentrate and persist with their work. Probing questioning helps students to dig deep and recall what they have already learnt so that they can expand on their answers and explain their thinking. Teachers provide much encouragement and swift verbal feedback on students' efforts which helps them to work purposefully. Some written marking is of high quality, clearly indicating what students have done well and what they need to concentrate on next, but this is not consistent across all subjects.

Based on careful observation by staff over a number of years, the teaching for students with the most difficulties is organised in a particularly supportive manner. It allows those who need more security and are easily distracted, to concentrate within an environment that offers them sheltered individual spaces but with the opportunity to contribute fully to whole class lessons. Here the teaching is as skilled as elsewhere in the school with both adults offering students exceptionally well-judged challenge which gets the best out of them so that they make visible progress in lessons.

The planning for all lessons clearly indicates the adjustments needed for each student, and the teaching takes good account of different ways of learning. Timed tasks and good use of interactive whiteboards help students to refocus and maintain their attention. All staff have very good knowledge of students' different needs but their individual education plans do not have sufficiently sharply worded targets to capture the, sometimes small, steps in progress that students make.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The outstanding curriculum is bespoke-made for each student, taking into account their statement of special needs and any gaps in their academic learning, personal and basic life skills. The school's detailed induction arrangements ensure that individuals' needs are confirmed at a very early stage so that they begin to make progress soon after arrival and achieve exceptionally well over time. All lessons place a strong emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills. Students' awareness of diversity expands through learning about, for example, the Elizabethan age, the slave trade, Kenya or the Vietnam war. Their appreciation of the arts extends through lessons in art and design, and one-to-one musical instrument tuition.

Careers education is available to all from Year 9 upwards and the curriculum to promote students' personal, social and health education is wide ranging. Students in Year 10 have an impressive knowledge of the negative impact that substance misuse has on health. All students spend one day a week off-site pursuing outdoor, adventurous activities such as rock-climbing or skiing, all of which are accredited. The school sees vocational education courses as an educational stimulus rather than just the acquisition of job-related skills. Students' success on these courses and in more academic subjects fully justifies that view.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The outstanding and detailed attention that the school pays to students' welfare, health and safety ensures that they feel confident to talk about their concerns and to turn to staff for support. Students say that they feel safe at The Brambles. One-to-one meetings between students and their key-worker provide regular opportunities to discuss what is going well and what might be done to improve those aspects that are less positive. Staff are vigilant throughout the day and highly skilled at pre-empting potential conflict. Daily information sheets clearly display which students are, for example, at college or pursuing outdoor educational activities, any medical information or particular learning needs, and which accompanying staff member is trained in first aid. A senior staff member signs off each such risk assessment before anyone goes off-site. Using the school's

own minibuses and with appropriate escorts, school staff transport students to and from school on a daily basis and also, when necessary, parents to reviews of their child's progress, thereby ensuring good attendance. Nourishing meals and snacks make a strong contribution to students' wellbeing.

Staff receive regular training in safeguarding procedures and other areas to support students' welfare, such as first aid and the safe use of physical restraint. The school conducts rigorous checks on the suitability of all staff to work with children and redeploys its own staff members in the event of any absence, to ensure consistency for the students. The school's procedures to deal with bullying have a high profile, and staff are swift to nip in the bud any potential problems. Students are fully aware that all types of bullying are wrong although they admit that sometimes some students 'try to push the buttons' or 'peck each others' heads'. The school's procedures to reduce the risks associated with fire, such as fire drills and appliance checks, fully comply with requirements.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

The Brambles is so successful at helping students to achieve because the leadership and management are first rate. The day runs like clockwork, without any bells and despite the individuality of students' timetables, because all staff know the expectations and are absolutely committed to the school's ethos. Staff performance management is regular, linked to students' progress and very supportive, in order to keep driving forward improvement. Leaders have enabled five former key workers to achieve qualified teacher status.

The management board meets regularly, has an accurate view of the school's strengths and relatively weaker areas, and constantly seeks ways to improve, 'how to make things right for each child.' The proprietor has successfully ensured that all statutory regulations are met. The premises are pristine, well maintained and well adapted, inside and outdoors, to accommodate the numbers of students and the teaching of the full range of subjects. The school makes all the required information available for parents, carers and the relevant local authorities and goes to great efforts to involve them in the students' progress. The policy and procedures for handling complaints meet requirements. The words of one staff member aptly sum up the school's great strength which emanates from the leadership: 'I have worked in a variety of similar settings and find this the most supportive of young people.'

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 the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	136003
Inspection number	422819
DfE registration number	888/6111

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	Special Day School
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Gary Holliday
Headteacher	Alan Rainford
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,281.00
Telephone number	01772 454826
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