

Brandles School

Weston Way, Baldock, SG7 6EY

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2014

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.

- Brandles School is a good school.
- Teaching is good and the proportion of outstanding teaching is rising. Senior leaders and governors have effectively tackled any weak teaching.
- Senior leaders and managers have a good understanding of the school and so target improvements effectively.
- As teaching has improved so has students' achievement, especially in reading.
- All students make good and some make better progress.
- Many students who receive additional funding through the pupil premium make particularly good progress.
- Subjects students are taught are being widened and accreditation for students in Year 11 has increased considerably.
- Governance has improved since the last inspection and so it keeps a close eye on the school and students' achievements.
- Leadership and management are good and both the senior leadership team and subject leaders set challenging targets and work successfully to improve teaching and students' progress.
- Behaviour and safety are good with students having an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and safe.
- Students fully appreciate the work staff do in helping them overcome their behavioural difficulties. They say they feel safe and staff look after them well.
- Attendance has improved rapidly and is in line with that of other special schools.
- Students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development are good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in mathematics is lower than that in English.
- Subject leaders and teachers cannot easily access information regarding the progress of the different year groups.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 11 lessons and was joined by the headteacher in all these observation.
- Meetings were held with a parent, a group of students, senior members of staff and the Chair and another member of the governing body. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector looked at documentation regarding students' progress, the school's self-evaluation, school improvement, minutes from governing body meetings, safeguarding and child-protection documents and attendance figures. The inspector also scrutinised students' work both within classrooms and around the school.
- There were no responses to the parents' online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Ronald Hall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Brandles School is a special school for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is increasingly accepting students with autistic spectrum disorders and moderate learning difficulties.
- The school has a high proportion of its students who enter and leave the school at times other than those usually expected.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- All the students are boys.
- Almost half the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium funding, which in this school provides extra funding to the school for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- The school does not receive the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The school uses Knights Templar School, Ridgemonnd College, Watford Gardens, North Herts Educational Support Centre, North Herts College and several Hertfordshire special schools to support its work and provide greater learning opportunities for its students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by making sure that all teachers extend the good practice developed in English into mathematics lessons and so increase progress rates in this subject.
- Develop leadership and management further by making the analysis of data concerning the various groups in school more accessible to subject leaders and teachers so they can plan the future learning of students more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students enter the school with low and often very low attainment and many enter the school late in their educational lives at school. They make good progress at the school and develop basic skills successfully.
- Achievement across the school is good and the proportion of students who make and/or exceed expected progress in both English and mathematics compares favourably with national expectations for students with similar learning disabilities.
- Many students enter the school at times other than those normally expected and many enter late into Year 9. However, due to well-planned learning programmes and good support from teachers and other adults who support learning, these students make good and at times outstanding progress.
- Those students who receive pupil premium funding make good and for some outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because the school carefully links the subjects they are taught with the students interests and individual needs, this in turn motivates the students and they enjoy their learning. This results in these students quickly catching up with others in school and by the end of Year 11 they are only approximately half a term behind them.
- For Year 11 students the school provides a wide range of subjects and other vocational and work experience opportunities. This has resulted in the number of qualifications achieved rising and the levels of vocational courses being higher. One student for example, was able to gain several General Certificate of Secondary Education grades in Year 10 and as he stated, 'the teachers have created individual courses just for me, I want to do well for them and me.'
- The senior leadership team highlighted that reading was lower than other subjects within the school and through further training for staff, new resources and improvements in teaching skills reading has improved rapidly and is now a strength of the school. It has also resulted in achievement in English improving.
- However, achievement in mathematics has fallen slightly due to the focus on English and due to the loss of the subject leader. A new mathematics teacher has been appointed and the senior leadership team is beginning to make sure that teaching staff develop their skills further in this subject.
- Across the school students' achievement in their social, moral, religious and cultural development is good. This can be seen by their good and at times excellent behaviour. In the way they interact with each other and all adults, as well as in their understanding and acceptance of the views and opinions of others.
- There are no differences in achievement between students regardless of their different backgrounds and/or circumstances, which shows the strong commitment of all the staff and governors to making sure that all are treated equally.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching across the school is good. The proportion of outstanding teaching is increasing due to

the good leadership and management of teaching.

- All staff know the students well and due to small class numbers prepare and deliver well planned individualised lessons. Teachers make learning fun and often base lessons around each student's interests. As one student stated, 'the staff here are great, they know no boundaries in their commitment to helping us learn and improve our behaviour.'
- In all lessons observed staff used good questioning skills and discussions with students to help them develop their understanding of the aspects being taught. Teachers carefully monitor the progress of each student and used this information to inform future sessions.
- Teachers make lessons as practical as possible to help maintain the students' concentration and so that they can see and understand the value of the skills and knowledge they are learning in their everyday lives. This was clearly seen in a food technology lesson where students created a meal using only basic instructions and the knowledge they already had, which allowed students to experiment with herbs and various food combinations. As one student stated, 'working like this means I can cook for myself and understand what is healthy for me.'
- Teaching by external providers is good resulting in at least good achievement for students in their vocational courses.
- Reading skills have improved due to teachers undergoing further training and all staff making sure that reading skills are developed across all the subjects taught. This was clearly shown during a mathematics lesson where students were encouraged to read the questions set and all adults present supported their reading skills.
- The partnership between teachers and the other adults who support learning is excellent and this means that all adults in the lesson know their role, are well briefed as to who they are supporting and how. Subject knowledge is good and staff challenge students to do the best that they can.
- Given the students' learning difficulties they attend lessons punctually and clearly enjoy learning. As one student stated, 'before I came here I was lucky if I spent twenty minutes a week in lessons, here I'm in lessons all day every day'.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because teaching over time has not been consistently good or better. However, the senior leadership team and governors acted quickly to remove any weak and/or inconsistent teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in Brandles School is good. Students enter the school having had many years with poor behaviour, yet within a short time students learn to manage their behaviour well. Exclusions have halved and incidents of poor behaviour in and around the school have rapidly reduced.
- Generally lessons are relaxed and enjoyable with students trying hard to achieve and do well for their teachers. As one student stated, 'I don't understand why these people do it. Sometimes we lose it and give them a rough time but they come back day after day to help and support us. So we try our best to do well for them.'
- Students know the rules and understand the rewards and punishment system well and staff

apply the policies consistently. This consistency means that students know where they stand and that all staff treat them equally.

- Students are highly supportive of the staff and feel the school keeps them safe and secure. The parent spoken to by the inspector was full of praise for the school and stated that all the parents she knew felt the same way.
- Students have a good understanding the various forms of bullying and know how to stay safe on the internet and outside of school.
- Student safety is good and all students feel that the school is as safe as possible. All safeguarding aspects meet requirements and risk assessments for all onsite and offsite activities make sure that students are always safe.
- Excellent routines and rules maintain student safety. In a technology lesson provided by an external provider students were learning how to carry out a range of electrical wiring techniques. Students handled a range of tools and electrical equipment sensibly and safely at all times and could fully explain why they needed to do so.
- Attendance has doubled and is broadly in line with that of similar schools nationally.
- Students have a positive attitude to learning and this has resulted in improved achievement across the whole school. Behaviour and safety is not outstanding, as very occasionally students do lose concentration in lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management in Brandles School are good. The senior leadership team and governors have worked hard to bring about continual improvements within the school. The school's evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate and is based solidly on robust evidence from monitoring and tracking of all elements of the school's work.
- The monitoring of teachers' performance has been used effectively to raise the quality of teaching and to remove any weak and/or inconsistent teaching. This has resulted in teachers undergoing continual training to further improve and support their skills and develop new understanding. Their performance is closely linked by the senior staff and governing body to the teachers' pay and professional development.
- There are good links with parents, the local authority, specialist agencies and a wide range of external providers and several local schools. All these links provide the students with a greater range of learning opportunities, specialist support for their learning difficulties and provided staff with a range of opportunities to develop their teaching skills further. The senior leadership team also used these links to moderate and evaluate the work of the school.
- The local college placements have allowed the school to increase the range of subjects it can offer, as well as extend the quality and range of vocational qualifications students can achieve. The close links the headteacher has developed with other similar special schools provides opportunities for students to mix and work with other students and so help prepare them for future educational and/or work placements.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to raise student achievement, through one-to-one support, individual work experience and/or college placements, specific resources and the use of

external professionals to support in school learning opportunities such as horticultural studies.

- The senior leadership team uses information on individual student's progress effectively to make sure that should any student not be progressing as well as expected they can react quickly to provide interventions to bring them back to expected progress. One example of this was in spotting that progress in reading for many students was not as rapid as in other subjects. Senior leaders put into place staff training, purchased new resources and studied methods of teaching, resulting in progress in reading rising rapidly. This demonstrates good capacity for future improvements.
- The subjects students learn are constantly reviewed to make sure that they meet the needs of all the students and provide suitable and achievable qualifications in both academic and vocational subjects.
- Senior leaders and subject managers all monitor the school well, carrying out lesson observations, work scrutiny and reviewing student progress. However, the manner in which they can access information regarding student progress does not easily provide information relating to the various groups in the school. This means that subject leaders and teachers cannot always plan for these various groups as easily.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has restructured since the previous inspection resulting in well organised committees who know their roles. The governors undergo regular training to make sure they can fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They gather a range of information from a wide range of sources and so know the school well. The governing body makes sure that the performance of all staff is looked at effectively and sets challenging targets for both the headteacher and all staff. They are clear about how good teachers are rewarded and weaker ones are supported to improve. The governors know how well students are doing in school and that there are no differences between the various groups in schools. They know about the quality of teaching through regular headteacher reports and their own observations of teaching. They carry out their statutory duties effectively and all safeguarding aspects meet requirements. Financial management is robust and governors have a good understanding of how the pupil premium funding is being spent and the results it produces.

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	131060
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	431181

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kathy Dunnett
Headteacher	David Vickery
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2011
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