

Batchwood School

Townsend Drive, St Albans, AL3 5RP

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have been exceptionally effective in tackling the issues identified at the previous inspection. They provide outstanding leadership for the school.
- Senior leaders have been very clear about where improvements were needed. They have taken appropriate action to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching. As a result, both are now outstanding.
- Students' aspirations have risen as a result of positive changes to the curriculum and clear systems for tracking progress.
- Students study a wide range of courses that provide a good balance of academic and vocational experiences. At the end of Year 11, nearly all students go on to college, an apprenticeship or some form of work-based learning.
- Well-structured partnerships with alternative providers have supported a shift in focus since the previous inspection. There is now a much stronger focus on learning and on making sure that students achieve exceptionally well.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding, and students make remarkable improvements in their behaviour after joining the school. They display exemplary attitudes to learning because they are very clear about the expectations that all members of staff have for standards of behaviour.
- The school's engagement with parents is excellent and they very much appreciate its work. Parents are particularly impressed by the gains their children make in learning and improving their confidence and self-esteem.
- Subject leaders are taking on more responsibility but their role in leading learning is not fully developed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 17 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors also looked at students' work in lessons and talked to students about their work and their views on the school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on students' progress, its self-evaluation, development plans, information relating to behaviour and the safeguarding of students, and minutes from governing body meetings.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the head of care, subject leaders, teaching assistants and six members of the governing body. In addition, the inspectors had telephone conversations with members from each of the alternative provisions used by the school and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors took into account the 26 responses to the online survey (Parent View) in addition to the school's own parental questionnaire. Inspectors took into account the 28 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Aileen Thomas

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Batchwood School provides for secondary-aged students with social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. Most students have additional needs including autism, speech and language difficulties and moderate learning difficulties.
- Due to students' significant additional needs, the profile of the school has altered since the previous inspection.
- Over a third of students join the school after Year 7.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for certain groups, including students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- Almost all students are White British. English is an additional language for a small minority of the students.
- The school is the only Hertfordshire special school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that caters for girls as well as boys. However, there are more boys than girls.
- The school uses the following alternative providers in Hertfordshire to support individual students in re-engaging with learning: Sanctuary of Art, The Tabard Vocational Centre, Building Zone, and EYS Education and Youth Centre. A small number of students also attend a link course at Oaklands College.
- Childcare is provided on the school site at Lindees, an after-school club, though this is not managed by the governing body and was inspected separately.
- The school is involved in the National Special Educational Needs and Disability Pathfinder Initiative.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop the skills of all subject leaders so that they all become leaders of learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Many of the students have attended at least three other schools before joining Batchwood and this, combined with their wider difficulties, means their attainment on entry is low. The school assesses standards in English and mathematics when they first start so that progress can be measured accurately. Challenging targets are set and monitored termly to ensure the drive to improve is constant.
- The initial focus when students join the school is to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem, and the staff are extremely skilled in finding the best ways for students to learn by building on their strengths and interests. Staff have high expectations that progress will be rapid, and because students quickly become engaged and effective learners, they start to make up lost ground straight away. A Year 7 student told the inspectors that he hated reading at his last school but that now he can read about cars, he really enjoys it.
- As students grow in confidence and start to realise their potential, there is an expectation that they will gain academic qualifications. Students leaving the school in 2013 did particularly well in gaining high level passes in art, statistics and science and all of the current Year 11 students are on track to achieve well in a range of GCSE, Functional Skills and BTEC subjects.
- Detailed information gathered by staff about the learning and development of each student shows that they make outstanding progress. When their starting points are considered, the achievement of less and more-able students is equally remarkable.
- Work experience placements and transitions into college and work-based learning are well planned and supported ensuring that students continue to experience success in a range of academic and vocational subjects. Vocational taster days are held at Oaklands College each term for Year 7 and 8 students so that they can become more confident and informed about making choices about their future.
- Through the schools' outstanding assessment procedures, the performance of each student is tracked continually. All staff know the students extremely well and are quick to identify anyone at risk of not meeting their challenging targets. Reasons are investigated and appropriate support is put into place to ensure they are back on track.
- The majority of the students, including those who join the school at different times, those with autistic spectrum disorders, speech and language difficulties or other additional special educational needs make similarly good progress to other students. There is no discrimination and the school makes sure that equal opportunities are at the heart of its work.
- Many students have poor literacy and numeracy skills when they join Batchwood and in order to address this, the school has adopted a 'back to basics' approach. All staff have been trained to teach basic reading and numeracy skills. Communication skills, literacy and numeracy are now promoted well across all subjects and related to real-life experiences for the students, many of whom have now experienced success for the first time in these areas.
- School records show that there is no gap in the achievement between students supported by the pupil premium funding and other students in English and mathematics. This is because the school uses the funding it receives for training staff to be able to provide targeted support and to provide additional resources and enrichment activities. Year 7 catch-up funding has also been used well to support students to improve their literacy skills by providing targeted support.

These have had a positive impact on students' progress.

- The analyses of school data shows there is no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys, those from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Students who access alternative provision are also closely checked, which confirms that they also make at least good or better progress from their individual starting points.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The well-established and rigorous checking by senior staff, and on occasions the local authority and external consultants, have been central to the consistent rise in teaching standards since the previous inspection. High levels of focused training and support for staff have accompanied this and, as a result, teaching is always at least good with much that is outstanding. This has had a significant impact on the students' excellent progress.
- Highly effective teamwork is a feature of the school and the relationship between the staff and students provides the platform for outstanding learning. All staff have a very deep understanding of each student's individual needs and barriers to learning, and they work seamlessly together to address these. There is a real feeling of mutual respect and regard for each other.
- The school provides an exceptionally secure, friendly and safe environment for highly purposeful learning to take place. Classrooms are well organised and high quality displays celebrate students' achievement as well as being used to support their learning.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and students are always exposed to the correct subject language and to clear explanations. This results in students acquiring strong subject knowledge.
- For example in a design and technology lesson, students were very clear about what processes they had used to design a tea light. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson, students were learning about algebra where all the adults used the correct mathematical terms, took time to explain where students were unclear and had high expectations that students in turn would use these terms themselves, which they did.
- All learners make rapid progress and achieve excellent learning gains as a result of teachers' skilled use of assessment information and effective questioning. Work is not too easy or too difficult. There are always extension tasks for those who complete tasks early but equally there is effective support for those who need extra help to succeed.
- Literacy and numeracy are promoted extremely well across all subject areas and this is particularly evident in food technology, science, art, design technology and physical education.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of the students is outstanding. They first join the school because their extremely challenging behaviour has been too much for mainstream schools to cope with, but at Batchwood they learn to work together and support each other. Staff make the activities interesting and meaningful so that the students enjoy learning and as a result make good progress.

- The warmth and positive regard with which all staff treat the students enables them to offer support and guidance which are listened to and acted upon. Students take pride in the school and their achievements and treat adults and each other with courtesy and respect. As a result, behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding.
- Students make remarkable progress in improving and managing their own behaviour. This is because everyone expects them to do their best to improve and provides them with the help and support to do so. The recent establishment of the Phoenix Centre within the school provides a safe, calm and welcoming place for students to go to when they encounter difficulties in their day.
- The school's work to keep the students safe and secure is outstanding. Students say they feel safe, a view shared by every parent who responded to Parent View and to the schools' own questionnaire. Every response stated that students behave well and that bullying is not an issue. Students understand bullying in all its different forms, including cyber-bullying and told inspectors that bullying is not a problem in the school and that if they had any concerns, these would be quickly sorted out by staff.
- The school has established many partnerships with other agencies and professionals to provide support and enhance provision for the students. There are detailed arrangements made for students attending alternative provision, college courses and work experience placements to ensure that they are kept safe when away from school.
- Students have plenty of opportunities to think about ways to keep healthy by choosing from healthy options at lunchtime, devising and cooking their own healthy meals or taking part in a range of sporting activities and after-school clubs.
- Attendance has improved over time and is now broadly average.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- High expectations and a strong ethos based on the achievement of each individual student now pervade every area of the school. The headteacher is an exceptional leader and is highly committed to establishing a culture where the love of learning has real meaning and value to the students. All staff are totally committed to the school vision and work collaboratively to 'make every day count'
- The school works very closely with parents who are overwhelmingly positive about the way in which their children have been supported and encouraged to learn. As one parent stated 'We always knew our son had potential and you saw this in him and gave him the confidence to go forward in his future'.
- Systems for checking teaching and learning are very thorough and form part of effective arrangements for managing the personal and professional development of teachers and teaching assistants. All staff have access to high quality training which is linked to students' achievement, priorities identified in the school development plan and their own professional development. Any signs of deterioration in the quality of performance are quickly identified and immediately addressed with a bespoke package of support and challenge.
- There are robust systems in place to check students' attainment when they join the school, track

and record their progress. All planning documents make reference to levels and targets and these are openly shared during lessons.

- Students now follow courses that relate to their own strengths and interests, for example, hair and beauty, music production and construction, and many go on to college to gain further qualifications in these areas. Extensive and creative use is made of the outdoor environment to develop literacy and numeracy skills as students take responsibility for growing and planting vegetables and helping to maintain the grounds.
- Teachers take many opportunities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is partly achieved through consistent application of policies so that students develop an understanding of appropriate behaviour both in school and the wider community. The school also provides many opportunities for the students to be exposed to other cultures by visits out of school, visitors in to school and its very creative and innovative use of the outdoor environment as a vehicle for learning.
- Additional monies that the school receives, such as pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, are used extremely well to promote students' learning and involvement. In the past year, the school has used this funding to provide specialist literacy and numeracy support, enrichment activities and to pay for therapists.
- The school actively sought the support of the local authority and external consultants following the previous inspection and, together, they have worked collaboratively to significantly improve all areas of the school's practice.
- Staff morale is very high and all feel fully involved in development planning and review. Subject leaders are now taking on more responsibility for leading learning in their areas of expertise, but their role is not yet fully developed. Staff provide tremendous role models for the students and demonstrate resilience, understanding and care. Several staff told the inspectors that being at Batchwood was like 'being part of a big family where everyone knows, supports and helps each other'.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and robust. All staff are well trained and have a good and up-to-date understanding of their role in child protection. Governors too have been trained and overall practices are effective and supportive. The school works closely with other agencies who are concerned with the welfare of young people.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is outstanding. The governing body has provided an excellent level of support and challenge to the headteacher as she has strived to ensure that all students are given every opportunity to succeed. They are well aware of the targets set for teachers and what the school has done to tackle under performance. They ensure that the best teachers are rewarded for their efforts. Through their many formal and informal visits, they know the strengths of the school extremely well. Governors' personal skills and professional experiences are used very well in the various sub-committees so that they are able to contribute fully to the drive for continuous school improvement. Governors carefully scrutinise and discuss the schools' analyses of students' progress and the quality of teaching. In particular, the governors look for evidence of how the pupil premium is improving the progress of students that this extra money supports. They ensure that all finances are used well and that all statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.

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	117674
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430761

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	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kerry Pollard
Headteacher	Anne Spencer
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2012
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