

The Bridge School Sedgemoor

130 Taunton Road, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 6BB

Inspection dates 17–18 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and senior leaders have created a positive climate in which learning and good behaviour can flourish.
- There are good systems in place to ensure that students are safe. As a result, students trust the adults who work with them. This helps to build their confidence and self-esteem.
- Students make outstanding progress, often from starting points that are well behind their chronological age. The most able achieve highly, often gaining GCSE passes at grade C and above.
- Students make very rapid improvements in their skills of reading, writing, mathematics and using computers.
- Teachers check what students know when they start at the school and design programmes that ensure that each makes as much progress as possible.
- Detailed marking of work is very effective in showing students how to improve rapidly. Valuable discussions between students and teachers also contribute to this.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students get on well with adults and with each other. Staff are very skilled at managing students' complex needs.
- Students say there is very little bullying and the comprehensive records kept by the school confirm that this is the case.
- The school's work in mainstream schools to reduce the risk of permanent exclusion is successful and is valued by those schools' leaders.
- Looked after children make excellent progress because of effective use of additional funding and good communication with their carers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The management committee has achieved a great deal but is too reliant on a small group of members. As a result, there are gaps in its work, such as when interpreting data on students' achievement and checking the work of the school.
- Students have too few opportunities to mix and learn with others of their age in preparation for their return to mainstream education.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector, accompanied by the headteacher, visited all four of the sites used by the school, and observed parts of 12 lessons.
- The inspector scrutinised students' written work, including that completed in the previous school year, in order to analyse their achievement over a period of time and to assess the quality of teachers' marking.
- The inspector reviewed school documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, such as individual students' progress in English and mathematics. Other documents reviewed relate to behaviour and safeguarding, such as records of incidents and the way they were dealt with.
- The inspector held meetings with staff, students, the chair of the management committee and a representative of the local authority. The inspector also met with headteachers and senior staff of mainstream secondary schools that work closely with the school.
- There were insufficient responses from parents and carers on the Ofsted online Parent View questionnaire for the results to be considered. The results of recent surveys of parents' and carers' views carried out by the school were taken into account, as were written comments from key workers for looked after children on the school's roll. The views of 40 staff who completed a questionnaire were also considered.
- During this inspection, the inspector asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement for children looked after, those eligible for free school meals and the most able pupils. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of support services.

Inspection team

Paul Sadler, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school serves students experiencing educational difficulties in the Sedgemoor District of Somerset. This includes the towns of Bridgwater, Highbridge and Cheddar and the surrounding rural areas.
- At the time of the previous inspection in 2011 the school comprised The Link Centre, which educates students whose complex medical needs have a significant impact on their education. In September 2013 three other pupil referral units in Bridgwater were closed and amalgamated with The Link Centre under the name of The Bridge School Sedgemoor. A new headteacher and senior leadership team were appointed, and a new management committee was established.
- The Bridgwater Centre caters for pupils and students in Years 5 to 9 and The New Prospects Centre caters for pupils in Years 10 and 11. These pupils and students have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, or are at risk of exclusion. Staff from these two centres also provide a service to mainstream schools designed to reduce the risk of permanent exclusion. The Tone Centre educates students with profound emotional and behavioural difficulties, most of whom have been permanently excluded, in most cases from special schools.
- At the time of the inspection there were 45 students at the school. However, the school can cater for up to 75 students and, later in the school year, is usually full. In 2013–14 the school had contact with 144 students. Some students spend only a short time at the school and many are dual registered, meaning that they also remain on the roll of their mainstream school.
- All students have special educational needs, mostly behavioural and/or learning difficulties. Some students, mainly attached to The Link Centre, have complex medical needs.
- The proportion of students in receipt of free school meals is above average. However, these students are mostly dual registered and the school does not receive the additional pupil premium funding which they attract. No primary school sports funding is received for the small number of pupils in Years 5 and 6.
- The proportion of looked after children, at around 15%, is very high. These students are in most cases registered solely at the school, which receives the additional funding to support their learning.
- The school uses a wide range of external provision including Bridgwater College, The Alternative Education Centre, an equine centre and art and play therapists.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the contribution of the management committee to the leadership of the school by:
 - ensuring that there are enough active members to carry out the required tasks without individuals being overstretched
 - providing the committee with information on students' progress that is simple to interpret
 - ensuring that the school's website is readily accessible and contains the required information on the impact of additional funding on students' achievement.
- Improve students' preparation for return to mainstream education by increasing opportunities for them to learn and socialise with more young people of similar age.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Work to ensure that all students learn and behave well in all four settings has been successful. There are consistently high expectations of what students can achieve in all aspects of their lives. The headteacher, supported well by senior and middle leaders, and other staff set a good example to students in their own work, for example through the very detailed advice that students receive through marking and feedback.
- Management of teachers' performance, and that of other classroom staff, is rigorous and effective. Increased pay and levels of responsibility are linked accurately to staff performance. Staff report that this process is fair and that it supports their commitment to the students through the provision of appropriate training.
- The curriculum is constructed well to meet the needs of each student. A great deal is done to improve their skills of reading, writing and using mathematics and combines well with a range of other subjects, including science and food preparation. Where students have personal interests that cannot be met in school, such as rugby, equestrian sports or learning construction trades, these are sought from alternative providers.
- Staff have a good understanding of the recent changes to the National Curriculum and are in the process of adapting work appropriately. They are also working effectively with mainstream schools to develop an approach to checking students' progress that will be used by all schools in the area.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well in a number of ways. Issues such as the negative impact of bullying and substance abuse and concerning the building of positive relationships with others are reinforced constantly. Assemblies and the use of techniques such as art therapy develop social and cultural understanding well.
- Students are taught to be tolerant of others and to appreciate other British values such as fairness and democracy. The full range of such work is too long to list but has a good impact on students, many of whom have little understanding of these values when they start at the school.
- The school works very hard to involve parents, many of whom have had negative experiences of schools and of others in authority. The parent and families support adviser makes regular visits to homes to advise parents and to check on any unexplained absence. The school has especially strong relationships with those responsible for the care of looked after children, many of whom are based in other parts of the country.
- The safeguarding of students is a high priority for the school. All adults are checked and the level of training in child protection is rigorous. Students know those things they might tell adults that must be passed on to another person, and which other matters may be treated in confidence. This enhances their level of trust in the adults.
- A notable strength is the quality of risk assessments of external provision. These are very detailed and result in a contract signed by both parties specifying, for example, the level and frequency of checks that must be carried out on adults. School staff check on students' experiences on a regular basis.
- The local authority knows the school well and in most respects provides good support, for example for improving teaching. When students experience difficulties in their lives, criteria are used to decide what level of help is given. Staff report that these criteria are interpreted differently by different agencies. They agree, however, that if the difficulty requires immediate action this is usually forthcoming and is effective.
- Additional funding for looked after children is used well to improve their achievement, but the exact impact is not checked thoroughly. This is because it often relates to improved social and emotional skills which are harder to measure than, for example, improvements in reading. Nevertheless, this aspect is a relative weakness.
- The school does not routinely receive the additional funding which students entitled to free school meals attract, because of their dual registration. The management committee has earmarked part of the school's funds to achieve similar outcomes for all students and this enhances their achievement.
- The school's recently established website is difficult to locate using common web browsers. It contains the required information apart from an analysis of the impact of additional funding.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee is well led by the knowledgeable chair. Most of its functions, including oversight of teaching and safeguarding, are carried out very effectively. Members are told about the overall performance of staff and of how this links to their pay and responsibilities. They have developed effective ways of checking the school's work when they visit, agreed with staff.
 - Most of the work is carried out by a small core group who give much time to the work. Ambitious plans for the future of the school, for example to build a new school, are likely to increase the workload still

further. While managers receive data on the school's performance, this is not always easy to interpret so there are gaps in their understanding of how well the school is doing. They have a good understanding of the achievement of looked after children but are less clear about the achievement of students entitled to free school meals.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. All four bases are orderly, calm places where students work hard and learn rapidly. They respond quickly to teachers' instructions and enjoy their work. They listen well and nearly all follow instructions when asked to do so.
- Students are proud of their school. A yearbook, produced by those who left recently containing many positive comments about staff, other students and the curriculum, supports this notion. Looked after children rate the school as the best of the many they have attended. 'Ten out of ten', one told the inspector. The school is successful in promoting tolerance and positive relationships. This is brought about through the commitment of staff and members of the management committee to equality of opportunity.
- The progress made by students in improving their behaviour is often remarkable. On starting at the school, a group was unable to complete a short minibus journey because of their poor behaviour. Less than a year later they took part successfully in a residential visit to London.
- Students say there is very little bullying among students. Parents and carers who responded to a recent school survey agree. The school's thorough record keeping also confirms this picture.
- The school does not tolerate any unacceptable behaviour. Fixed-term exclusions take place from time to time, usually when a student becomes extremely frustrated, rather than being violent or bullying. It is important to stress that a significant proportion of students have in the past been through periods of considerable personal challenges, so reaching this position is a significant achievement.
- On starting at the school, many students have a record of non-attendance or poor attendance at other schools. Staff ensure that all students attend as regularly as possible. Any unexplained absence is checked immediately. For a few students in The Link centre, attendance is limited by their medical conditions. A range of methods including home tuition is used to ensure that these students continue to learn as much as they can.
- The reason why behaviour is not outstanding is that students do not have enough opportunity to mix with larger groups of young people of similar age. The opportunities they have, for example at college and other alternative providers, are usually tightly controlled by adults. This point was raised by students as a weaker aspect of their preparation for life when they leave the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Examples include the strong emphasis on safeguarding and child protection, and the high quality risk assessments carried out on alternative provision. Many staff are trained in methods of calming frustrated young people, many of whom have learned to mistrust adults in the past. They use these techniques very successfully and always follow guidance on best practice in the field.
- Students are taught very well about how to keep themselves safe. This includes work to promote good health, including the importance of healthy eating, exercise and avoiding substance abuse. Students speak confidently about these matters and the dangers linked to ignoring the advice. They have a good understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being.
- Students know how to avoid the dangers associated with the misuse of electronic media. They are aware that this can lead to bullying or to inappropriate contact with adults and are keen to encourage other students to behave well in their electronic communications.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- . All students' skills of reading, writing and mathematics are checked immediately on arrival at the school and excellent plans are drawn up to ensure their achievement is maximised. These plans take into account students' special educational needs, disabilities, and whether they are a looked after child.

- Teachers check students' progress very effectively through regular tests, observations and other methods. Programmes are adapted to overcome any barriers to progress that may be identified. Continued checks ensure that students, including the most able, are entered for the most demanding examinations that they are capable of achieving. All these approaches contribute to students' excellent achievement.
- Marking and feedback to students are used in an outstanding way. Marking is very detailed and shows the student how their work may be improved, for example through better use of paragraphs or punctuation. There is much useful discussion between adults and students that reinforces what needs to be done to ensure rapid progress.
- Teachers' are particularly skilled in using language and examples that students can readily understand, such as when learning about the different ways in which heat moves through substances. They start with simple explanations and investigations, and then use more complex language so that students can achieve the higher grades of GCSE science.
- Teachers are adept at building students' self-esteem and confidence. They praise students for genuinely good work and do not accept second best. They are also highly skilled at identifying possible frustrations and defusing students' potential anger.
- The additional staff who work with students are very well trained and make a good, positive contribution to their achievement. Specific skills, such as in art or sport, or counselling skills, are used very effectively by school leaders to contribute to students' progress.
- Teachers give much beyond what is required of them. They negotiate placements with additional providers and regularly check students' progress at these. Teachers deal personally with any problems that arise at these placements. Students recognise the high level of support they receive and welcome this.
- Teachers use their skills in dealing with the complex needs of students well to avert permanent exclusions, or enabled students to return to mainstream education. Records show that, where students with profound medical needs are taught at home, they also make the best possible progress. Headteachers of mainstream school value highly this level of support.
- Teachers' good knowledge of looked after students' social and emotional needs is use well to deliver tailored programmes. These, combined with regular discussions with those responsible for their care, are meeting their personal requirements very well. As a result, these young people are facing the future with much improved confidence.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- All groups of students make equally outstanding progress. This includes boys and girls, those with a wide range of disabilities or special educational needs, and those who attract additional funding including looked after children.
- On starting at the school, students typically have the skills of reading, writing and mathematics expected of pupils aged 7 to 9. This means they may be as much as seven years behind their chronological age in developing these skills. This is often due to poor school attendance in the past.
- From these very low starting points, students make excellent progress. Reading skills develop quickly so that students can read with understanding and, increasingly, for pleasure. In a science test, Year 10 students read questions several times so that they fully understood what was required.
- Writing skills also develop quickly. Students learn to write accurately, and make outstanding progress with English grammar, punctuation and spelling. For example, a Year 10 student made rapid progress in learning about when the word 'and' should be replaced by a comma. As a result, students attain good passes in English examinations, including GCSE passes at grade C and above.
- In mathematics, students make very good progress in learning basic skills that will serve them well in adult life. For example, Years 10 and 11 students learn how to estimate length and angle, and how to calculate area. They realise these skills can be very useful especially, for example, if they pursue a career in construction.
- Students learn quickly how to use computers and other information and communication technology to help them learn. They also learn how to use the internet safely and about dangers they may encounter online.
- Students also make outstanding progress in developing their emotional and social skills. Their relationships with teachers and other adults improve quickly as trust develops. They learn to share and cooperate with other students, and to control their emotions when frustrated or annoyed.
- Students, especially those who are looked after and who will be leaving care in the relatively near future, make very good progress in learning cookery and other domestic skills. They also learn how to

budget and to make wise choices in a range of situations, from making purchases to forming relationships. This means they leave school with the necessary resilience to tackle future challenges. Additional funding is used well to help bring about these achievements.

- The most able students are quickly identified and plans are drawn up to maximise their potential. They attain good sets of GCSE results that include English, mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry. Able mathematicians take increasingly demanding tests that give them the motivation to move on to the next stage. Students with abilities, for example in sport, work with students at specialist mainstream schools and colleges that enable them to achieve at very high levels.
- Students enjoy, and gain a great deal from, the many additional activities offered. For example, a residential experience in London enabled them to learn quickly about city life and the range of faiths and cultures represented in British society. At additional provision, such as at Bridgwater College, they make equally outstanding progress as they do in school.
- As a result of their outstanding achievement at the school, almost all students return to mainstream school or move on to college, where they study courses directly relevant to their future employment. School leaders continue to monitor their progress, especially to ensure former students remain in education, employment or training.

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	134758
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	447987

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Paul Baker (Management Committee)
Headteacher	Nigel Shipton
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 October 2011
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