

The Bridge School

Sprites Lane, Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 3ND

Inspection dates

6–7 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- There has been a long-standing and serious decline in standards since the previous inspection.
- Safeguarding systems are woefully ineffective, including procedures to recruit staff.
- The local authority issued a warning notice to the school in October 2017 following serious and ongoing concerns about safety in the school. The local authority and school leaders have not ensured that these weaknesses have been tackled.
- A series of interim leaders since the autumn term in 2017 have not had any sustained impact on addressing the multiplicity of serious leadership failings across all aspects of the school's work.
- There is no coherent curriculum and assessment process or system in the school. In particular, pupils in the secondary school and sixth form have a very poor quality of provision.
- There is poor practice and a lack of effective staff training in meeting pupils' needs academically, personally and physically. Pupils are not well supported and too often become distressed and behave unsafely.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are weak. Staff expectations about what pupils can achieve are far too low. Adults do not prepare young people well enough for the next stages in their lives, including independent living.
- The learning environment is unkempt and of poor quality. In particular, the provision in Reception and on the secondary and sixth form site does not suitably meet the complex needs of pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The current interim headteacher and senior leaders have a thorough understanding of the systemic weaknesses in the school.
- There is a core group of staff who are working with the new leadership team to try to bring about the urgent improvements required.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, the interim executive board (IEB) and the local authority should urgently address the significant and wide-ranging safeguarding issues in the school by:
 - improving staff recruitment procedures so that all checks are thorough and adhere to safer recruitment requirements
 - ensuring that leaders support the most vulnerable pupils in the school fully, including those involved with external agencies and children looked after
 - overhauling attendance procedures so that there are thorough checks on the safety and well-being of pupils when they are absent
 - routinely reporting to the local authority when children are missing from education
 - ensuring that all concerns identified by the local authority in October 2017 have been rectified appropriately, including fire, health and safety checks
 - improving staff vigilance in identifying potential signs of concern and making appropriate referrals in a timely way
 - creating a curriculum that teaches children and pupils about how to keep themselves safe, in a way that is appropriate to pupils' individual needs, ages and abilities.
- Rapidly coordinate the work between the local authority, interim leaders and the IEB to bring about urgent improvements by:
 - agreeing the coordination between the school, the IEB and the local authority to ensure that the school urgently gets the resources and support that it requires
 - creating clarity about the roles, responsibilities, systems and procedures in all aspects of the school's work, including teaching, achievement, behaviour, attendance and the impact of the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding
 - improving the learning environment for children and pupils throughout the school, especially addressing the serious inadequacies in some areas of the site
 - reviewing the school day to ensure that all pupils have full-time education
 - creating an effective curriculum for pupils so that they all receive high-quality opportunities both within and across years groups, including in early reading development, development of communication skills and well-thought-out trips, visits and enrichment activities
 - establishing thorough reviews of pupils' wide-ranging needs so that pupils have better-quality support, including well-coordinated care plans for pupils with multi-agency support and complex needs, and good-quality education, health and care (EHC) plans.

- Address the weaknesses in teaching, learning, assessment and achievement, including in the sixth form and early years, by:
 - establishing an accurate assessment system that reviews pupils' progress from their varied starting points
 - planning work over time that engages pupils and ensures that they make acceptable progress
 - raising staff expectations about what pupils can achieve
 - developing staff training so that adults can support pupils' specific special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, including pupils' communication, reading, personal care and independent living skills
 - ensuring that learning environments are clean, well kept and support pupils' learning and development, including the use of appropriate resources, outdoor space and displays.
- Urgently ensure that pupils' behaviour and welfare needs in all year groups are being met by:
 - training staff to be confident in using strategies that better meet the specific behavioural needs of children and pupils, so that pupils' poor behaviour is addressed appropriately
 - ensuring that any use of physical restraint and behaviour strategies is appropriate, well recorded and reviewed routinely
 - establishing better support for young people to meet their personal care needs throughout the school day, including the development of skills that will support them in becoming as independent as possible in the future
 - developing social times such as lunch and breaktimes to support pupils to understand and engage in positive social interaction with one another.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The local authority identified significant safeguarding concerns in autumn 2017 about safety in the school. These issues, and many more, have not been addressed. As a result, safeguarding is ineffective.
- There has been a serious and ongoing decline in all standards at the school since the previous inspection. The local authority acknowledges that it did not become fully aware of the underperformance and significant concerns in the school until these had become entrenched issues by autumn 2017. A series of interim leaders since this time have failed to tackle the widespread weaknesses.
- The local authority does not have a clear enough understanding of the urgent needs of the school and does not provide sufficient support to new leaders. Support for the current, newly appointed interim leaders has not been well coordinated because communication between the local authority and the school is weak. Leaders too often receive unhelpful, inconsistent or contradictory messages from various local authority officers.
- The curriculum and assessment processes throughout the school are weak. There is no curriculum plan or accurate assessment system, most notably in the secondary school and sixth form. Too often, pupils are provided with activities which keep them busy, rather than a well-thought-out programme of study. This often leads to pupils becoming disengaged, distressed and behaving inappropriately.
- The learning environment does not meet the needs of the pupils. In some areas, it is of dire quality. For example, the provision in the secondary school and sixth form does not enable pupils with limited mobility to move around the site safely and independently.
- There are no embedded systems for monitoring and evaluation of the school. This includes information about pupils' behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the use of additional funding. There are no effective systems to monitor achievement or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all subject areas.
- Staff absence is very high. Inspection evidence shows that this has been an issue in the school for at least 18 months. This has a dramatic impact on the school's ability to support pupils well and raise standards.
- Leaders do not ensure that all pupils have their statutory entitlement to a full day of education while at school. Despite pupils' punctual arrival at school, slow starts to the day, inefficient movement around the school between lessons and breaks, poor use of lesson time and, on occasion, a rather haphazard use of random 'breaktimes' means that some pupils have significantly reduced access to appropriate learning opportunities.
- Leaders' use and review of the additional or top-up funding that they receive has made little discernible difference to pupils' progress. This includes the funding for disadvantaged pupils, the Year 7 catch-up premium and any additional funding for SEN and/or disabilities. There has been no thorough or meaningful evaluation of the impact of this funding.
- The school does not meet its statutory responsibilities for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities as laid out in the Children and Families Act 2014. EHC plans are of poor quality; there is a lack of information about social care and health professional

involvement. Educational targets are weak. Review processes about pupils' provision and needs are not thorough, especially for those pupils transferring onto EHC plans. Around 17 pupils have not yet had an EHC plan assessment and are likely to miss the conversion deadline of the end of March 2018.

- New interim leaders since January 2018 have an accurate understanding of the weaknesses in the school and what needs to change in order for the provision to improve. They are being supported by a core of staff who are keen to improve the school's provision. However, these leaders have not yet had time or capacity to have an impact on the widespread weaknesses in the school.

Governance of the school

- The school's governing body was replaced by an IEB consisting of two professionals with an education background.
- The IEB has been in operation since January 2018. It is too early to determine the difference that this team is making to the school.
- Initially the IEB, led by its chair, quickly identified the range of issues facing the school and had a clear understanding of the persistent weaknesses in the provision, including significant concerns about safeguarding, the school site, the curriculum, assessment, teaching and behaviour.
- There has been a change in leadership of the IEB very recently. The process for how this group is commissioning urgent and additional support from the local authority is not yet well developed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- There are long-standing and systemic failures in the school's safeguarding arrangements to protect vulnerable pupils with the most complex needs.
- The local authority identified a series of concerns in safeguarding and health and safety in October 2017. The local authority has not returned to ensure that all safeguarding inadequacies have been rectified. There is a lack of clarity from the local authority on who is responsible for checking these issues and of the role of the IEB in this.
- Systems to recruit staff are sloppy. Leaders do not have a clear system for recruiting staff or for keeping an up-to-date list of those employed by the school. Leaders do not check the recruitment information that they receive thoroughly to be assured that they have taken all reasonable precautions when employing staff.
- Over time, leaders have not reviewed the school's systems to ensure that there are adequate checks made on absent pupils. Too many pupils have been absent for extended periods of time without thorough checks on their well-being. The information about prolonged absence is not passed to the local authority.
- Until very recently, there has not been sufficient vigilance over concerns raised by staff about the well-being of pupils. There has been no sustained and appropriate support

for vulnerable pupils, including where there are various ongoing concerns. There is a lack of timely referrals to external agencies where appropriate. Very poor-quality historical record-keeping means that current leaders do not yet know if they are supporting all of the pupils who are involved with external agencies.

- Adults have not been trained fully or supported well to be vigilant to pupils' needs or to signs of concern. As a result, staff's understanding of how to keep pupils safe is weak, especially with regard to pupils' vulnerability to exploitation and extremism.
- Current interim leaders do not believe that the school is providing pupils with an adequate curriculum that teaches them about how to keep themselves safe in a way that is appropriate to their needs and stages of development.
- Current interim leaders are bringing about improvements in safeguarding systems, training and record-keeping. However these systems are not yet fully established or being used effectively by all staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Adults' expectations of what pupils can achieve are far too low. Teachers and teaching assistants have not received adequate guidance over time to challenge their perceptions about what pupils can achieve. As a result, pupils are often pacified with activities rather than actively learning and developing.
- There is no effective assessment system to support staff in accurately measuring pupils' achievement and progress in order to plan effective learning. Adults have insufficient information about pupils' progress in their personal, cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as in their academic learning. Adults do not support pupils to develop the skills required for independent living. As a result, pupils' progress is poor and shows little sign of improvement.
- There is far too much inconsistency in the quality and effectiveness of learning activities. Too often, pupils receive the same activity irrespective of their starting points or previous learning. Furthermore, pupils are often provided with activities that fill time but do not help them to develop or learn.
- Pupils who have the potential to achieve more, especially those who are the most able, are not identified quickly enough. They do not receive work or guidance which help them to develop or learn as quickly, or as well, as they could.
- Teaching and learning do not encourage rapid development in pupils' communication skills. Teachers' low expectations and inherent weaknesses in the curriculum mean that pupils are not given opportunities to develop their communication skills securely, including through the appropriate use of communication technologies. As a result, pupils do not make the progress they are capable of.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.

- Staff do not meet pupils' welfare needs. Care plans, risk assessments, feeding plans and EHC plans are all weak in their review and implementation. Adults do not ensure that the complex and multifaceted needs of pupils are being met on a daily and longer-term basis. As a result, pupils are not being cared for or developing as well as they should.
- Pupils who have the potential for independent living are not well supported to develop the necessary skills.
- Children in the Nursery develop an early understanding of personal hygiene and self-care. However, as pupils get older, they are not encouraged to develop independence in handwashing, dressing or toileting.
- Pupils are not supported well enough to communicate their feelings and emotions. Staff turbulence means that many staff do not know pupils well. Leaders do not know whether pupils feel safe, and pupils are not supported well enough to give their views about their learning, development, aspirations and interests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- There has been a significant and long-term decline in behaviour at the school. In 2016/17 there were over 2,000 incidents of poor behaviour. Many of these included the recurrent and escalating behaviour of the same pupils. Many of these issues were not resolved or dealt with appropriately.
- Too often, adults are ill-equipped to deal effectively with pupils' behaviour. Staff training in supporting the significant and complex learning needs of pupils is ineffective. This results in pupils becoming distressed and their behaviour escalates into sometimes violent and unsafe actions.
- There is a routine use of physical restraint with some pupils, which is poorly recorded and rarely reviewed by leaders. There is little follow-up support for these young people.
- Weak monitoring of attendance means that pupils and their families are not being encouraged or supported well enough to improve attendance. Attendance is lower than average and shows no real signs of improvement. Leaders do not know how many pupils are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- A lack of coherent systems means that pupils' progress has not been monitored effectively. Leaders are unable to provide any evidence that thorough monitoring of pupils' progress has occurred in 2016/17 or 2017/18, especially for secondary pupils and sixth-form students. Inspectors were not provided with sufficient evidence that can be reported on.
- Reading and communication programmes across the school are underdeveloped. There is no coherent systematic phonics programme in the school to support pupils to

develop their understanding of letters and the sounds that they make. Leaders do not plan for pupils to develop reading and communication well enough, including through the use of communication technology.

- There is a complete lack of thorough planning within year groups, and across year groups, to ensure that pupils make progress in their personal development. Too many pupils' personal development and behavioural needs are not being met effectively. Consequently, current pupils are making inadequate progress in this aspect of their learning and development.
- Leaders have not undertaken any thorough evaluation of the additional funding that they receive for disadvantaged pupils. There is no evidence that this funding has had any impact on the achievement and progress of pupils since the previous inspection.
- There is no planned process or coherent way to support and prepare pupils who are leaving the school at the end of Years 11, 12 or 13 for their next steps in training, education, employment or independent living. Where pupils do find appropriate next steps, this is down to ad hoc arrangements, such as the support and goodwill of individual staff, or proactive parents and carers.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Leaders have not secured rapid, sustained improvements in the quality of provision in the Nursery and Reception since the previous inspection.
- Although there are better embedded assessment systems in the Nursery classes, this is far weaker in Reception classes. This means that planning for children's specific needs is not precise enough, and often all children undertake the same activities which fill time but do not help them develop as individuals.
- Children are not given sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful play activities. Children are not supported and encouraged quickly enough in their independent play to develop their language and communication skills.
- The learning environment, although more appropriate in the Nursery provision, is not a vibrant learning space. There is no sufficient celebration of children's most recent work and successes, especially in their development of skills. Teaching and the environment are not adapted well enough for the children.
- Resources to meet children's sensory, communication and physical needs are underdeveloped, both indoors and outdoors. The small outdoor areas are not maintained well with activities which stimulate and engage children.
- Staff training does not help them to develop their use of questioning, their teaching of early phonics and communication, or how to meet children's specific and complex SEN and/or disabilities. This means that the learning and behavioural concerns evident in the rest of the school are also apparent in the early years.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- The provision for students in the school's sixth form is incredibly weak.

- There is no curriculum or assessment system currently in place that plans for students' learning over time.
- The quality of teaching and learning is poor. Students do not access resources, activities or support that are well thought out to match their specific SEN and/or disabilities. Often, students achieve very little in their lessons. Learning time is routinely wasted because activities are not well matched to students' abilities and needs.
- Too many students are disengaged, and some wander the site aimlessly. Staff are not well equipped to meet their varied learning and behavioural needs. Students spend long periods of time disengaged and can, sometimes, exhibit signs of distress or discomfort.
- The provision for developing students' life skills and independence is ill thought-out. Students undertake routine visits off site, but there is no plan about how these will meet each individual student's needs against their own personal targets for development.
- The sixth-form provision does not meet the physical and sensory needs of students. Current leaders have recently moved students to a downstairs classroom owing to safety concerns about the upstairs classroom. However, leaders acknowledge that the current site, while safer, is of poor quality.

School details

Unique reference number	124909
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10049124

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.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	5
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Philip Illsley
Interim Headteacher	Anthony Dickens
Telephone number	01473 556200
Website	www.thebridgeschool.org.uk
Email address	office@thebridgeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 January 2015

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average school. It is currently oversubscribed.
- The school provides full-time education to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Most pupils have an EHC plan or a statement of special educational needs. Those children who do not have an EHC are mainly in the Nursery and Reception classes. Leaders are in the process of applying for EHC plans for these children. Most pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders.
- The school comprises two sites next door to one another: a primary site and a

secondary site.

- Pupils typically enter the school with achievement significantly below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for additional funding is above the national average.
- No pupils currently access alternative provision.
- The information about the school on the Department for Education website ('Get information about schools' or 'GIAS') states that the school has children on the school's admissions register aged 2–19. Current interim leaders believe that this is incorrect and should state 3–19.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a local authority investigation into serious allegations about restriction of liberty at the school.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that since the previous inspection a serious incident that occurred while a child was in the care of staff employed by the setting is under investigation by the appropriate authorities.
- While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time to inform inspectors' judgements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook learning walks and observation on both sites, and reviewed pupils' work. Most lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with the interim headteacher, the interim deputy headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector met with representatives from the IEB. The lead inspector also met twice with representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, achievement, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and carers, pupils and staff on site.
- Inspectors observed pupils' arrival at and departure from school and their conduct at break and lunchtime, as well as between lessons.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sharon Wilson

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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