

# Brandles School

Weston Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6EY

## Inspection dates

20–21 February 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Safeguarding is ineffective. Leaders, governors and the local authority have not created a culture of vigilance in safeguarding pupils.
- The local authority and governors identified significant concerns about declining academic and behavioural standards in 2016. Despite actions taken by recently appointed leaders, the good standards seen at the previous inspection have not been maintained.
- Governors have an overgenerous view of the impact of leaders' work on raising standards. They do not make good use of the information they receive to ensure that they have an accurate view of the quality of provision.
- Leaders' monitoring does not focus sharply enough on the difference that adults are making to the progress and development of pupils.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. Leaders do not support staff to focus on improving the progress of pupils from their differing starting points.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of some pupils, particularly the most able.
- Some pupils do not attend school regularly. Their sporadic attendance results in slow progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- Since his arrival, the headteacher has significantly improved the day-to-day running of the school.
- Staff are committed to the pupils in their care, despite the challenges the school has faced since the previous inspection.
- All pupils who left the school in 2017 at the end of Year 11 went on to appropriate next-step education, training or employment and have sustained this.
- Teaching and learning in physical education (PE), art and science are good. These subjects are well led. Pupils make good progress in these areas.
- Additional support provided by the school's welfare team is making a positive difference in supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, governors and the local authority should take urgent action to ensure that the school has a systematic approach to keeping pupils safe by:
  - establishing consistent checks on pupils who are not attending regularly or who leave the school midway through the year
  - ensuring that leaders quickly identify pupils who are missing from education, and refer their concerns promptly to the local authority
  - making sure that all staff provide leaders with appropriate records of their safeguarding concerns about pupils
  - taking timely and appropriate steps to act on significant concerns raised about pupils' well-being, including when working with external agencies
  - improving ongoing communication with the police and social care services to ensure that pupils at risk of harm receive the support they need
  - ensuring that all instances of physical restraint are recorded systematically and reviewed routinely by leaders and governors
  - ensuring that leaders, governors and the local authority maintain a clear overview of the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that revised procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and assessment, and behaviour and attendance, become firmly embedded and fully effective
  - improving the curriculum to raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly the most able
  - ensuring that governors use information provided by leaders more effectively to ensure that they gain a much clearer understanding of the school's effectiveness.
- Continue to improve attendance and behaviour by:
  - increasing the skills and confidence of all staff to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils
  - ensuring that staff are able to meet pupils' complex learning needs and can help pupils improve their own behaviour
  - providing further support and challenge for pupils who are regularly absent from school
  - reducing the use of part-time timetables.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the achievement of

pupils, by:

- using assessment information so that all adults can identify when pupils are ready to achieve more
- sharing the best practice from PE, art and science about how to best plan activities that enthuse pupils to make rapid progress
- continuing to develop literacy and numeracy strategies across all subjects.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Safeguarding is ineffective. Leaders, governors and the local authority have not ensured that processes to protect vulnerable pupils are well established or monitored as rigorously or systematically as they should be.
- Standards in the school have declined since the previous inspection. The local authority and governors raised considerable concerns in 2016. Leaders and governors have not resolved all of these concerns. Standards remain too low.
- The local authority support has not been successful in supporting leaders and governors to stem the decline in standards. Support for the school has not been effective in securing rapid improvements. This is evident in the ineffective safeguarding procedures and the poor attendance of some pupils.
- The curriculum is not meeting the needs of all pupils. Provision is underdeveloped for the most able pupils, some pupils taught off site and for those on part-time timetables. These pupils are not yet making the progress of which they are capable. Leaders are now better meeting the complex needs of most pupils in their care while they are on the school site.
- The day-to-day running of the school has improved. Since his appointment a year ago, the headteacher has shown tenacity and resilience in securing greater stability. He has also restructured the senior team and implemented essential systems so that leaders can begin to monitor attendance, behaviour, achievement and teaching. However, leaders are not yet evaluating the impact of their work.
- Leaders and governors are using the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils with increasing effectiveness. The headteacher and governors have brought a greater rigour to the evaluation of how this money is allocated to address the many challenges that pupils face in their learning. They ensure that where pupils have individual support, the impact of support is evaluated for its impact.
- Subject leadership is developing. It is strong in PE and science. The new senior leader for assessment has supported subject leaders to create a well-thought-out assessment system. Staff are starting to link with other schools and with local authority advisers to check the accuracy of their assessments.
- The headteacher and governors are determined to ensure that pupils have the appropriate specialist support. They have invested in the school's own education welfare service on site. This is a real strength in the school's provision. This team supports pupils' specific social and emotional needs, while also engaging pupils in community projects, work experience and appropriate alternative provision. Pupils are also gaining qualifications and accreditations, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, through this programme of support. The team also supports families in challenging circumstances, with one-to-one support and engagement at parental coffee mornings.

### Governance of the school

- Governors have not ensured that the school meets its statutory duties to safeguard pupils.

- Governors have an overgenerous view of the performance of the school. This is because they have not taken sufficient notice of the information provided for them by leaders and the local authority. Their scrutiny and evaluation of current standards in the school lack rigour.
- Governors too readily accept more positive evidence of pupils' progress without asking appropriate questions. For example, governors do not challenge leaders over discrepancies between pupils' achievement and information provided by leaders about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has an impact on governors' ability to have an accurate view of standards in the school.
- There are ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of governors. This affects the governing body's ability to provide effective oversight of the various issues. While some governors are very well established, there are also a number of less experienced governors who are still developing in their roles.
- Despite these weaknesses, governors are passionate about the provision. They visit the school frequently and they know individual staff and pupils well.
- Governors were tenacious in raising their concerns about school standards prior to 2016, and have been diligent in the subsequent recruitment process for a headteacher who has started to bring about improvements in the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders have not ensured that they routinely check the whereabouts of pupils who are not on the school site. This includes pupils who do not attend routinely, are on part-time timetables or who have left the school midway through the year. Leaders do not routinely identify when pupils may be missing from education, or use appropriate local authority procedures to systematically refer these concerns.
- Procedures for monitoring the concerns raised by staff about pupils' safety and welfare are not sufficiently rigorous. Leaders do not routinely link previous concerns raised about pupils to ensure that they have a full picture of concerns. Pupils who are at risk are not always supported in a timely way, because referrals to external agencies are sometimes delayed. This includes pupils who have been supported in the past by external agencies.
- Leaders do not engage well enough with external agencies, such as police and social care professionals. They do not routinely seek information about pupils who are already known to these agencies. As a result, checks on the well-being of vulnerable pupils, especially when they are not on the school site, are not thorough.
- Leaders do not review their procedures to ensure their effectiveness, including the use of physical restraint and procedures to deal with complaints.
- School improvement advisers and the safeguarding governor have raised concerns about the school's safeguarding arrangements. However, leaders have not responded promptly to check and improve the arrangements. Serious inadequacies in basic record-keeping have been missed and therefore have not been tackled. Staff do not routinely record their concerns about pupils in line with the school's agreed procedures. Too much emphasis is placed on the designated leaders for safeguarding to remember, record and interpret concerns raised by staff, and this is not effective.

- The headteacher and his leadership team, and the link safeguarding governor, acknowledge the inadequacies in safeguarding. They were able to provide inspectors with a plan about how they intend to improve the culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that the site is appropriately secure.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Planning focuses too heavily on the completion of tasks, regardless of pupils' academic ability or previous learning. Most pupils undertake the same activities, irrespective of their starting points. As a result, pupils complete their work but do not make consistently good progress.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is too varied. Teachers in a range of subjects do not ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunity to enjoy writing, improve their handwriting or develop literacy and numeracy skills. Inspectors found some good examples of pupils applying basic skills to their written work, but this is not consistent.
- Adults do not use questioning well enough to develop pupils' understanding or to extend pupils' answers, particularly in English and mathematics. Support provided by teachers and teaching assistants tends to focus on whether pupils complete tasks and have an understanding of the topics being taught, rather than providing them with the right level of challenge.
- Teachers have rightly focused on improving pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour, particularly those who have significant social and emotional needs. Pupils are encouraged to develop essential skills, such as for social interaction, communication and keeping safe, to aid their learning. Consequently, lessons are now generally calm and orderly. These procedures are new and need more time to become fully established.
- Reading is promoted effectively. Pupils are enthusiastic about reading aloud in front of their peers and, at times, engaging with more complex language. On these occasions, pupils show maturity and resilience in their efforts to improve their reading skills and comprehension.
- Pupils engage fully in PE, art and science. Those involved in alternative programmes and other provision on site coordinated by the school's welfare team also engage well because learning is relevant and enjoyable. These pupils learn well and develop the confidence to try more challenging activities. However, this good teaching and learning is not common across all subjects in the curriculum.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Requires improvement

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.

- Pupils do not always receive timely welfare support when they need it. Pupils have access to some high-quality provision. However, not all of it is matched well to pupils' emerging needs. Risk assessments designed to support individual pupils are not routinely updated when significant events occur or when pupils' circumstances change.
- Pupils' behaviour is generally appropriate and managed effectively by staff. However, a small minority of pupils are not supported well enough to develop the social and emotional skills they require. Some of these pupils are not reintegrating back into full-time learning soon enough or in a sustainable way.
- The school's welfare team is starting to make a real difference to pupils with challenging social and emotional needs. This team is working effectively with pupils and their families to support their specific complex needs. These strategies are not being consistently used by all staff across the school. Therefore, the impact on pupils' long-term behaviour and development is not fully apparent.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The attendance and behaviour of a significant minority of pupils are not improving quickly enough. Consequently, pupils do not have the full-time provision they need.
- As a result of relentless work by leaders over the past year, pupils now conduct themselves appropriately around the school site and wear their uniform appropriately. The school is generally calm. Where a few pupils struggle to moderate their behaviour, procedures are followed by staff to deal with this quickly so that it does not significantly affect the learning of others.
- Breaks and lunchtimes are calm and orderly. Pupils engage with one another in the varied activities provided for them, often with enthusiasm. An increasing number of pupils are given enhanced privileges for showing exemplary behaviour and attendance.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- From their starting points, the progress made by pupils across the school is uneven. Pupils make better progress in their personal development and in PE, art and science. However, this good progress is not mirrored in other subjects because weaknesses in the use of assessment mean that work is not pitched at the right level for pupils with different abilities.
- This year, leaders have implemented a new test of pupils' social and emotional health. This work is very new. Therefore, leaders do not yet know the impact that they have on meeting the significant needs of pupils when they arrive at the school.
- Current leaders have identified that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are not sufficiently challenged. Consequently, this group of pupils do not make rapid progress and are not fully prepared to achieve well in more challenging qualifications by the time they reach key stage 4.
- Leaders now assess pupils on their entry to the school. They are able to identify and support the academic progress of pupils, especially those who are in key stage 4.

- Last year, pupils in Year 11 achieved a number of qualifications in a range of subjects. Leaders widened the number of subjects taught, giving pupils more opportunities in new subjects such as GCSE human health and physiology.
- The same Year 11 pupils all went on to gain appropriate post-16 destinations in training, education or employment, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. School leaders have kept in touch with these pupils since they left the school to ensure that they all remain in these destinations and succeed. This is a significant improvement compared with the experience of pupils who left the school in previous years.



## School details

Unique reference number	131060
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023553

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	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Pat Furness
Headteacher	David Pearce
Telephone number	01462 892189
Website	<a href="http://www.brandles.herts.sch.uk/">www.brandles.herts.sch.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@brandles.herts.sch.uk">head@brandles.herts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	February 2014

## Information about this school

- The headteacher started at the school in October 2016.
- The school provides education for 49 pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The school provides support for pupils who have significant social, emotional and mental health needs. Admission to the school is through local authority referral.
- All pupils in the provision have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils enter with attainment that is significantly lower than expected for their age or after extreme turbulence in their previous school experience.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- Some pupils access alternative provision at North Herts College. A number of pupils also undertake work experience or engage with local community youth projects.

- A small number of pupils on roll do not attend lessons on site or are on part-time timetables, but access online home tuition provided by the school.
- The local authority provides school improvement advisers and a group of multi-agency professionals to work with leaders, following significant concerns raised in 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors conducted learning walks and reviewed pupils' work alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector met with governors and held telephone conversations with two school improvement advisers provided by the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, achievement, attendance and behaviour.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to inform the inspection. However, inspectors reviewed the small number of free-text messages, as well as some of the letters and commentaries provided by the school about parental views.
- Inspectors reviewed 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- No pupils completed the pupil survey. Inspectors met with a small group of pupils while on site and spoke with pupils informally around the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at breaks and lunchtimes, as well as between lessons.

## Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kim Hall	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tania Perry	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

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](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2018