



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

**Inspection report**  
**The Brakenhale School**

**Bracknell Forest Education Authority**

Dates of inspection: 23 and 24 November 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	The Brakenhale School
Type of school:	Secondary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Headteacher:	Mrs J Herriman
Address of school:	Rectory Lane Bracknell Berkshire RG12 7BA
Telephone:	01344 423041
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr A Young
Local education authority area:	Bracknell Forest LEA
Unique reference number:	110047
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr C J Redman HMI
Dates of inspection:	23 and 24 November 2004

## Introduction

1. The Brakenhale School is a comprehensive secondary school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. It is situated on the southern side of Bracknell and draws most of its pupils from the local housing estates. The school is smaller than average with 537 pupils, including a very small sixth form of 45 students. Just over ten per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, broadly in line with national figures. Just over 30 per cent of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, which is below the national average, but this figure includes 19 pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, which is well above the typical proportion for secondary schools. Most of the pupils are of white British heritage and only 18 pupils speak English as an additional language.
2. The school was inspected in October 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of October 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on five occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In November 2004, three HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of October 2002.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
    - standards across the school have risen since the October 2002 inspection, but are not yet good enough. Although only 22.8 per cent of the Year 11 pupils achieved five or more A\* to C grades in the 2004 GCSE examinations, predictions based upon the pupils' previous attainment suggested that only 14.9 per cent would reach this level. Almost all of the pupils (97.1 per cent) achieved at least one GCSE pass and nine out of ten achieved five or more A\* to G grades, similar figures to the previous year. The pupils were most successful in information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology, physical education and child development; they were least successful in history and modern foreign languages;
    - in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests, the proportion of the Year 9 pupils achieving the expected Level 5 in mathematics rose sharply by 11 percentage points to 66 per cent; a third of the pupils achieved Level 6 or higher. However, there were marked falls in English where only half of the pupils reached the expected level and a slight fall in science; just under half achieved Level 5 or higher;
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- the 2004 A-level results fell significantly; the small cohort of 15 pupils taking A2 examinations achieved average points scores that were well below the national average. The AS results were also unsatisfactory. In too many cases, the pupils taking A levels did not have the foundation of good subject knowledge to benefit adequately from the courses;
  - standards in lessons were markedly higher than the public examination and test results. In top sets, the pupils worked above the levels typical of their age, particularly in Key Stage 4 where some achieved high standards. However, most of the pupils' attainment was below the expected levels, particularly in Key Stage 3;
  - standards in English have improved since the October 2002 inspection, but are below national expectations; standards of writing are particularly weak. Standards in mathematics have improved significantly and are close to typical levels for the pupils' age;
  - behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved significantly and is now good. Permanent exclusions are rare and the incidence of fixed-term exclusions has decreased;
  - attendance has improved to 90.9 per cent, close to, but below, the average for secondary schools nationally;
  - the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils respect the school's accommodation; for example, there is no evidence of graffiti, litter is rare and displays are respected;
  - the quality of the pupils' learning, including their progress, has improved radically; it was at least sound in nearly every lesson and good or better in 60 per cent. This improvement has been achieved by involving the pupils more actively in lessons and giving them significant responsibility for their learning. The pupils responded enthusiastically to demanding tasks and their recall of previous work was usually good; they are becoming more independent in their learning, no longer having to rely on adult help to make progress. Where the learning was less successful, expectations of what the pupils should do were too low. Weak literacy and numeracy skills continued to restrict the learning of a minority of the pupils;
  - the quality of teaching has improved fundamentally; two thirds was good or better, including almost a third that was very good or outstanding. In only one lesson, in modern foreign languages, was the teaching unsatisfactory;
  - the provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is good and they make sound progress;
  - leadership and management have improved significantly at all levels and are now good. The headteacher has provided outstanding leadership, working with determination to reverse the decline in the school's educational provision, raising expectations and improving teaching and learning. She has nurtured
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the skills of senior and middle managers so that they have led their areas more confidently. She is supported by an effective senior leadership team;

- progress against the governors' action plan, drawn up following the October 2002 inspection, has been good and the capacity of the school to improve standards further is also good;
- the curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced and satisfies all statutory requirements;
- in the past, the sixth-form curriculum has focused too greatly on traditional A-level studies; this weakness has been addressed for the current Year 12 students who have chosen one of three appropriate pathways, two leading to vocational qualifications and one to traditional academic study. Despite the improved curriculum, recruitment to the sixth form is too low and some group sizes are uneconomic. The school is rightly prepared to accept high costs for the sixth form while it takes steps to improve recruitment by raising the aspirations of Key Stage 4 pupils to remain in education after they are 16 years old;
- financial management has improved. The headteacher, governors and the local education authority (LEA) have worked hard to establish the exact financial position of the school after many years of uncertainty. Currently, there is a projected deficit of £25,000 for the financial year to April 2005. The LEA has agreed to support the school as it works towards bringing its budget into balance;
- governance has improved significantly. At the time of the October 2002 inspection, the governors did not hold the school to account adequately for its fall in standards and were over-reliant on reports from the school to judge its effectiveness; these weaknesses have been resolved and the governors are now effectively acting as the school's critical friends;
- the hard work and dedication of the staff have led to marked improvements in the quality of teaching and learning over the past two years so that the school now offers a good quality of education;
- the LEA has provided good support to the school. This has included financial support to stabilise the budget, and professional advice to help improve behaviour, teaching and learning. The LEA knows the school well based on effective monitoring; it has undertaken to continue to monitor the school's progress closely.

## Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards in all subjects, particularly modern foreign languages and history;

- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that unsatisfactory teaching is eradicated and more of the teaching and learning becomes good;
- improve the effectiveness of the sixth form.

## Inspection findings

### Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards across the school have risen since the October 2002 inspection, but are not yet good enough. Although only 22.8 per cent of the Year 11 pupils achieved five or more A\* to C grades in the 2004 GCSE examinations, predictions based upon the pupils' previous attainment suggested that only 14.9 per cent would reach this level. Almost all of the pupils (97.1 per cent) achieved at least one GCSE pass and nine out of ten achieved five or more A\* to G grades, similar figures to the previous year. The pupils were most successful in ICT, design and technology, physical education and child development; they were least successful in history and modern foreign languages.

8. In the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests the proportion of the Year 9 pupils achieving the expected Level 5 in mathematics rose sharply by 11 percentage points to 66 per cent; a third of the pupils achieved Level 6 or higher. However, there were marked falls in English, where only half reached the expected level, and a slight fall in science, where just under half (48.2 per cent) achieved Level 5 or higher.

9. The 2004 A-level results fell significantly; the small cohort of 15 pupils who took A2 examinations achieved average points scores that were well below the national average. The AS results were also unsatisfactory. In too many cases, the pupils taking A levels did not have the foundation of good subject knowledge to benefit adequately from the courses.

10. Standards in lessons were markedly higher than the public examination and test results. In top sets, the pupils worked at above the levels typical of their age, particularly in Key Stage 4 where some achieved high standards. However, most of the pupils' attainment was below the expected levels, particularly in Key Stage 3.

11. Although standards in English are below national expectations in both key stages they have improved since the October 2002 inspection. The more able pupils speak confidently when expressing their views both when working in small groups or addressing the whole class. They use appropriate vocabulary when contributing to debates and take account of the views of other pupils when summarising discussions. Less able pupils struggle to express themselves in a coherent and structured form or to adapt what they have to say to suit the audience. Listening is at least satisfactory in all lessons with most of the pupils able to sustain their concentration for appropriate periods of time.

12. Standards in reading vary widely, with the more able pupils interpreting texts confidently and exploiting a range of intonation in order to communicate meaning. Many of the pupils select elements from what they have read in order to support their views both when writing and when involved in discussions. Nevertheless, a significant minority of the pupils read at levels that are well below those typical for their age. Those of lower attainment have difficulty establishing the meaning of unfamiliar words or drawing inferences with regard to the main themes contained within texts; they also require support and encouragement to read



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independently and express their opinions about what they have read. The pupils are beginning to read on their own outside lessons and are making good use of the resources available in the library.

13. Standards of writing are below those of other aspects of the pupils' work. Many pupils find it difficult to write confidently for a range of purposes especially when writing imaginatively. Basic grammar and punctuation is weak in situations where more complex ideas are to be expressed and communicated clearly to the reader. Spelling is also poor and some pupils in high sets for English make basic mistakes. In test situations, there is a tendency for the boys not to write full answers in response to questions. More able pupils analyse the work of other writers well and develop sophisticated arguments which suggest a growing awareness of genre. Presentation and handwriting vary in quality widely from good to unsatisfactory.

14. Standards in mathematics are improving significantly. The older pupils in Key Stage 3 work at just below typical levels. The higher attaining pupils calculate with good accuracy, including when using fractions, decimals and percentages; their use of algebra is above average and they have a good understanding of shape, space and measures, for example applying Pythagoras' theorem successfully to calculate lengths of the sides of triangles. They are starting to develop their own strategies for solving problems, organising information sensibly to lead to solutions. In middle-ability sets, the pupils calculate with typical accuracy, although some do not recognise gross errors when they are made; many can use algebraic symbols to represent variables and use formulae with reasonable facility. The lower attaining pupils do not calculate sufficiently accurately and do not have enough confidence in their mathematical knowledge to solve problems consistently correctly. At all levels of ability, the quality of graphical work is weak.

15. At the end of Key Stage 4, the mathematical standards of the higher attaining pupils are well above average. They have a confident understanding of a wide range of mathematics including algebraic fractions and surds. They use their knowledge well to investigate and solve problems; for example, justifying their approach and giving reasons for following or rejecting particular lines of enquiry. Most of the other pupils work at levels that are average or below. While they can copy a process, their underlying understanding is not sufficient to explain the key elements required to correctly solve a problem; as a result they too frequently do not recognise gross errors in their work. Standards of calculation are typical of their age overall. The lower attaining pupils, however, make frequent errors in calculations and have an understanding that is well below average.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

16. Behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved significantly and is good. The over-boisterous movement in corridors and incidents of intimidation reported in 2002 have gone. No unsatisfactory behaviour was seen during this inspection even when the pupils were unsupervised, for example in the eating area. The pupils show good respect for their teachers and for each other. A commercial programme to improve the management of behaviour has had an outstandingly positive impact on behaviour and on learning.

17. The proportion of the pupils who are excluded has reduced since the previous inspection. In 2002-03, 32 pupils were excluded for an average of four days; this reduced to 22 pupils in 2003-04. Permanent exclusions are rare. Since September 2004 the exclusion

rate has risen slightly, with nine fixed-term exclusions and one permanent exclusion. The reasons for these exclusions are well documented and demonstrate that violent and persistently defiant behaviour will not be tolerated.

18. Attendance has improved from 88.7 per cent at the time of the 2002 inspection to 90.9 per cent currently; this figure is close to, but below, the national average. There is a marked difference between year groups and between sets. In Years 7 and 11, and in top sets, attendance matches the national average. However, it is below average in lower sets and remains unsatisfactory in Years 8, 9 and 10.

19. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Spiritual development is addressed well in assemblies, some tutor sessions and personal, social and health education (PSHE). For example, presentations made by invited representatives from different faiths broaden the pupils' spiritual understanding. Opportunities for spiritual development in lessons are too limited, but opportunities for reflection on issues that are of cultural, moral and social importance are good. Many lessons contribute effectively to the social and moral development of pupils, particularly in the manner that the teachers relate to the pupils. For example, in a Year 7 PSHE lesson, the pupils discussed relationships very effectively; Year 10 pupils were able to write about the dangers of acid rain; in religious education, issues such as abortion and euthanasia are part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

20. Opportunities for the pupils to take responsibilities are much improved and are very good. These include checking lateness in assemblies and taking charge of relevant tasks in lessons and about the school; for example, in a Year 10 tutor session one of the pupils checked compliance with the school's uniform code. There is an effective school council consisting of elected representatives from each class who meet to consider suggestions for improvements in the school's provision. There is a good range of extracurricular activities, including sport, drama and homework clubs.

21. Refurbishment to the school site, buildings and classrooms has been significant and has improved the learning environment. The pupils respect the school's accommodation; for example, there is no evidence of graffiti, litter is rare and displays are respected. The quality of display to support learning is variable, some is good but in some areas it is not sufficiently well organised to stimulate learning effectively.

### **The quality of education**

22. The quality of the pupils' learning, including their progress, was sound or better in 32 of the 33 lessons, including 20 in which it was good or better and four in which it was very good or outstanding. This shows a radical improvement compared with the learning observed during the October 2002 inspection where learning was only satisfactory or better in just over half of the lessons. The learning has improved in response to the school's objectives of involving the pupils more actively in lessons and giving them responsibility for their learning. In many lessons, the pupils were eager to answer the teachers' questions and to ask their own questions to clarify their understanding. They responded enthusiastically to demanding tasks, clearly enjoying the challenge. Their recall of previous work was usually good and sometimes very good. They co-operated well in practical work and made good use of the opportunities to discuss problems and issues together. Many of the pupils were becoming more independent in their learning, for example, by persevering with tasks rather than asking

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for help from adults. Their research skills had improved significantly; for example, using the internet effectively when completing GCSE projects.

23. Where the learning was less successful, expectations of what the pupils should do were too low. Weak literacy and numeracy skills continued to restrict the learning of a minority of the pupils.

24. The quality of teaching has improved fundamentally; two thirds was good or better, including almost a third that was very good or outstanding. In only one lesson, in modern foreign languages, was the teaching unsatisfactory. This compares with teaching in October 2002 that was satisfactory or better in only two thirds of lessons, good or better in less than a quarter and unsatisfactory in a third.

25. The teaching has many strengths. Lesson-planning is mostly sound and often good. The selection of learning tasks is good with care taken not to demand too much of the pupils' listening skills. Good attention is paid to developing speaking, for example, by involving the pupils in short discussions and by making sure that questions are open, requiring the pupils to give extended answers. Exposition is mostly good and sometimes outstanding; this demonstrates the good subject knowledge of most of the staff. The challenge of the work is well matched to the pupils' previous attainment, particularly where different tasks were provided to extend some of the pupils' learning. Expectations of the pupils' involvement in their work are good and there is a growing recognition that the pupils are capable of achieving much higher standards. The most marked improvement has been in the quality of behaviour management which is generally outstanding.

26. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the challenge of the work and expectations were too low. In a few lessons, the pace of teaching was barely satisfactory.

27. The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is good and they make sound progress. The number of pupils on the register of special educational needs has seen an appropriate and marked decline since last year because their needs are now met in lessons. Assessment of the pupils' needs is effectively managed and there is a sound rationale for the support being provided in mainstream classrooms and in the newly redeveloped learning support unit. Individual education plans are of good quality and are updated on a regular basis. Teaching assistants are appropriately deployed by most teachers and are effective in ensuring that the pupils with whom they are working remain focused. For those pupils with more complex needs, including behaviour, appropriate programmes of referral into the learning support unit are arranged; there is a sound emphasis on core aspects of the curriculum and on the pupils being reintegrated into mainstream lessons with a better capacity to learn.

### **Leadership and management**

28. Leadership and management have improved significantly at all levels since the October 2002 inspection and are good. The headteacher has provided outstanding leadership since her appointment less than two years ago. She has worked with determination to reverse the decline in standards and the school's educational provision, and to provide a clear vision that has led to higher expectations of what the pupils should achieve, and improved teaching and learning. She has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has tackled the weaknesses tenaciously. She has nurtured the skills of senior and middle managers so that they lead their areas more confidently. She is supported well by an effective

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senior management team that has successfully implemented the governors' action plan and helped to bring about radical improvements in the school's provision.

29. The school's management structure is suitable; responsibilities are appropriately delegated to encourage the effective contribution of middle and senior managers. Each manager's accountability is understood well and this has helped the staff work more closely as a team. Senior and middle managers have a good understanding of how to introduce and lead developments to improve teaching, learning and behaviour. The systems for monitoring the school's work are rigorous and the quality of self-evaluation is very good. There are well-designed procedures for tracking the pupils' progress, analysing assessments and identifying areas of the curriculum that require further development. Subject leaders provide clear guidance for colleagues to improve the quality of teaching. The capacity of the school to improve standards and the quality of its provision is good.

30. Staff turnover has been high with 14 new teaching staff and 12 new support staff at the start of the September 2004 term; they have been inducted effectively so that they are implementing the strategies for teaching and behaviour management well. Two unusual appointments have been actors-in-residence who, as well as teaching drama soundly, are coaching presentational skills in assembly, developing the pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and contributing to the school's extracurricular provision.

31. The curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced and satisfies all statutory requirements.

32. In the past, the sixth-form curriculum has focused too greatly on traditional A-level studies; this weakness has been addressed for the current Year 12 students who have chosen one of three appropriate pathways, two leading to vocational qualifications and one to traditional academic study. Despite the improved curriculum, recruitment to the sixth form is too low and some group sizes are uneconomic. The school is rightly prepared to accept high costs for the sixth form while it takes steps to improve recruitment by raising the aspirations of Key Stage 4 pupils to remain in education after they are 16 years old. The school is involved with an LEA review of sixth-form provision across the unitary authority.

33. Financial management has improved. The headteacher, governors and the LEA have worked hard to establish the school's exact financial position after many years of uncertainty. Currently, the projected outturn for the financial year to April 2005 is a deficit of £25,000. The LEA has agreed to support the school as it works towards bringing its budget into balance.

34. Governance has improved significantly. At the time of the October 2002 inspection, the governors did not hold the school to account adequately for its fall in standards and were over-reliant on reports from the school to judge its effectiveness; these weaknesses have been resolved and the governors are now effectively acting as the school's critical friends.

35. The school has adopted many practices to evaluate whether it is offering best value; for example, it has used examination and test results suitably to compare standards with those of other schools locally and nationally. The staff have asked challenging questions of their provision; the level of debate about professional issues has improved significantly. Very good attention has been paid to the professional development of the teaching staff and improving the effectiveness of the administrative staff. The hard work and dedication of the

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staff have led to marked improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the school now offers a good quality of education.

36. The LEA has provided good support to the school. This has included financial support to stabilise the budget, and professional advice to help improve behaviour, teaching and learning. The LEA has a good understanding of the school based on effective monitoring; it has undertaken to continue to monitor the school's progress closely.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

37. The inspection report of October 2002 required the school to address four key issues. These related to: raising expectations of the pupils' achievement, improving their progress and raising attainment; improving the quality of teaching; improving leadership and management at all levels; and developing more positive attitudes to learning and achievement among the pupils. There has been good progress in all four aspects. While standards remain well below the levels typical of other schools locally and nationally, they are rising in response to better teaching. The pupils' progress has improved markedly. Many initiatives have been implemented to raise the pupils' self-esteem and aspirations; these also are helping to improve standards. The teaching has improved significantly; nearly all is at least satisfactory and two thirds is good or better, some being outstanding. Leadership and management have improved significantly so that they are now good. The most marked improvement has been in the pupils' attitudes to learning and achievement; the far-reaching changes have been brought about by effective approaches to behaviour management, and teaching and learning styles that have involved the pupils actively in lessons, requiring them to take a high degree of responsibility for their learning.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

The school was inspected by HMI in October 2002. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in April, July and December 2003, and in March and July 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of October 2002.

In November 2004, three HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Thirty three lessons or parts of lessons, an assembly and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior staff; informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of October 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.