



The Bridge School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103624
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276960
Inspection dates 21 June 2006 to 21 June 2006
Reporting inspector Janet Thompson HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	290 Reservoir Road
School category	Community		Erdington
Age range of pupils	2 to 11		Birmingham, West Midlands B23 6DE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4648265
Number on roll	34	Fax number	0121 4647619
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R V Crowley
Date of previous inspection	6 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Steve White

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Bridge is a school for pupils with profound and multiple or severe learning difficulties. Some also have autistic spectrum disorders. Well over half of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Two thirds of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and just over half of all pupils are from families where English is not the first language. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. From September 2006, the school will amalgamate with a local school for pupils with severe learning difficulties. The current headteacher here will be the headteacher of the amalgamated school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Bridge has a good, well deserved reputation in the local education community. It is a school that provides a good education for its pupils and has some outstanding qualities. The school's view of its effectiveness is good although it underplays the outstanding personal development the pupils make. It has a dedicated staff team who demonstrate a strong and lasting commitment to equality which ensures all pupils have access to a relevant and interesting curriculum. The management always ensures that the needs of the pupils are at the heart of its decisions. The teaching helps pupils to make good progress in their work and outstanding progress in their personal development. The whole school day is planned to help pupils become more independent. Regular opportunities to work alongside pupils of their own age from mainstream schools contribute to improving social and academic skills. Effective target setting ensures work is matched to the ability of pupils but progress could be even better if there was greater consistency in the use of signs, symbols and communicators. Pupils have a satisfactory start in the Foundation Stage. In the absence of national data, there is no agreed understanding amongst staff of what constitutes good or better progress for different pupils. Successful partnerships have been developed with local schools and high quality outreach support has been gratefully received. The school has improved in all the areas for development outlined in the last report but faces new challenges in matching the staffing expertise now available as a consequence of the forthcoming amalgamation. The school provides good value for money and has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the use of communication systems for pupils is consistent and access to these is always available.
- Ensure that all staff have a shared understanding about what constitutes good progress and how staff in different roles can contribute to improving the progress made by pupils.
- In light of the pending amalgamation, streamline procedures to maximise the potential of the increased expertise now available.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, given their abilities and starting points, pupils make good progress. There are some pupils for whom this is not the case but the senior management team have made changes which are helping improve their progress. Since the last inspection, work on improving targets has paid dividends and the targets are measurable and well matched to the needs of the majority of the pupils. There are a few pupils who would benefit from greater challenge to increase their progress. The school has also identified this and changes in the Foundation Stage are beginning to provide higher expectations of pupils. Five pupils access lessons in mainstream schools local to their homes and this has helped to improve their progress in acquiring and developing academic and social

skills. Over the last two years, the school has improved data collection. This has helped the staff to more effectively evaluate the progress made by different pupils. There is still a need for more accurate baseline recording and moderation exercises are going some way to improve this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to be aware of themselves, others and the environment and staff help them to become as independent as possible. Social and emotional development is significantly boosted by all pupils having weekly opportunities to work alongside pupils of their own age from local mainstream schools. As one parent explained, this 'helps them to have real childhood experiences, not always being reliant on adults'. Parents are confident that their children enjoy school and the pupils' enthusiasm for school was evident during the inspection. Attendance is satisfactory overall but good for many of the pupils. The school achieved a Healthy Schools award and is working towards the new standard. Healthy options are provided at snack and meal times and staff help pupils increase the range of foods they eat. The early morning 'warm up' is very popular and the energy created helps to start the day with a buzz. Throughout the day, pupils are given excellent opportunities to make choices for themselves. However, there are fewer opportunities when pupils can have a 'voice' about school developments. Relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding. Behaviour, supported by an effective rewards policy, is always good and often exemplary. Pupils are enthusiastic participants in their lessons. There are some outstanding examples of pupils taking on a supportive role with their class-mates, and this is carefully managed so that it is not patronising. The richness of a wide variety of cultures is firmly embedded into the curriculum and celebrations using multi-sensory approaches give outstanding opportunities for spiritual development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. In the best lessons, pupils are able to access symbols or other communication systems easily, and teachers use them regularly. Pupils' progress in lessons is in line with the quality of teaching. Good teaching is characterised by high expectations that stem from a clear understanding of the levels to which the pupils are working. Lessons are carefully planned with clear objectives linked to pupils' prior achievement. Individual education plans do not sit alone but are an integral part of lesson planning. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Work is matched to the needs of the pupils and ensures they make an effort whilst providing them with a goal within their reach. Enabling pupils to rise to the challenge is sensitively supported. A sense of fun is encouraged and this, with active participation, using practical well chosen resources, helps pupils to enjoy learning. In some lessons,

there is a need for greater consistency in the use of communication strategies and some pupils do not have enough opportunities to use their own initiative. Though the teachers use them well, the small teaching areas hamper the way in which access to activities can be planned.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides good breadth of experience for all pupils, regardless of the complexity of their needs. Planning is well matched to the pupils' needs and is designed to help pupils become as independent as possible. There is progression by age as well as ability. The time spent on both care needs and education is carefully balanced. Personal, social and health education is planned to help pupils learn how to be healthy and stay safe. Good resources are well planned to support teaching the curriculum using multi-sensory approaches. A very wide range of additional experiences is offered, including residential visits. These opportunities are planned so that all pupils can both enjoy them and learn from them. Visits into the community are closely aligned to the curriculum and enhance learning by providing links to real life. Weekly opportunities to work with mainstream schools are extremely well planned. Music and drama productions further enhance the opportunities for the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The combination of good procedures and exemplary practice by staff keeps pupils safe and secure while helping them to learn. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good. There are clear procedures understood by all staff and training is in line with national recommendations. To help pupils, the school provides very clear guidance on intimate care, feeding and medical procedures. 'Communication passports' help adults and other children understand the complex communication of some pupils. The school clearly respects the dignity of the pupils at all times. There is very good partnership work with other agencies and this helps pupils make good progress. The school has established shared accountability and the best use is made of the tight allocation of staff time. The school works tirelessly to involve parents to help improve their children's progress. The annual review system gives due attention to parents' comments and is well organised. Helping pupils move on to their next school is planned individually and ensures links are made with new schools and that information about pupils is shared.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The highly effective senior team has helped the school improve since the last inspection and is well set to improve the school further. The pupils' education and welfare are at the heart of decision making and leaders and managers have a good understanding of both the school's strengths and its areas for development. There is due consideration given to the views of people who form the school's extended community. Excellent

monitoring of pupil progress in recent years has resulted in the headteacher making some difficult staffing decisions. Provision has improved as a result and there has been more effective professional development, although there are still some inconsistencies in practice that need to be addressed. Subject leadership is less well developed than senior management, and staff in different roles do not always have a good enough understanding of how they can help to improve progress for all pupils. Through an exemplary approach, the school involves parents in its life and in their child's learning. Excellent networking has led to the school increasing its role in the local education community. Resources are good. Accommodation is inadequate and hampers more creative teaching. It also restricts ways in which the school can involve partner schools and multi-agency professionals as well as parents. These difficulties are reflected in a recent feasibility study. Governance is good. The budget is well managed and a greater understanding of best value principles has led to evaluation that gives due regard to the outcomes for pupils and staff. There is outstanding commitment by the chair of governors. His involvement in planning for the amalgamation has been very effective in protecting the needs of the pupils here, while also recognising the needs of both pupils and staff at the other school.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Children I enjoyed meeting you when I visited your school recently. It was lovely to hear about the things you enjoy at school and especially from the Poppies class about the trip to the farm when they stayed overnight. I hope Orchids class enjoyed it as much as Poppies did. This is what I found out about your school:

- The adults at your school work extremely hard to make sure you have many interesting ways of learning. They make sure that you are safe and well cared for.
- It is obvious that you enjoy school and have fun when you are learning. You work hard and make good progress.
- You are able to make choices throughout the day and so many of you try to help yourselves when you can. You could make some decisions about how the school can be even better than it is.
- Some of you need to have more chances to use signs, symbols or communicators.
- Your teachers help you to learn well. They need to talk together about how to be sure you are doing the very best you can. They might talk to you about this too.

I hope you will enjoy meeting and working with new friends next year. Thank you for making me so welcome and especially to those of you who helped me at lunchtime.

Yours sincerely Janet Thompson HMI