



Belmont School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131549
LEA Gloucestershire
Inspection number 282223
Inspection dates 11 October 2005 to 11 October 2005
Reporting inspector Steven Parker RISP

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Warden Hill Road
School category	Community		Cheltenham
Age range of pupils	4 to 16		Gloucestershire GL51 3AT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01242 216180
Number on roll	45	Fax number	01242 227-827
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Cllr Alan Pearce
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	Headteacher	Dr Anne Maddison

Age group 4 to 16	Inspection dates 11 October 2005 - 11 October 2005	Inspection number 282223
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Belmont school is a small special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, and, consequently, attainment on entry is below national expectations. There are 45 pupils on roll, well below the 80 at the time of the last inspection. The roll has been falling gradually over a number of years as a result of the LEA's policy to integrate pupils with learning difficulties into mainstream schools. Of the current population, the vast majority are in Years 7 to 11. There are only 3 primary aged pupils, 1 in Year 1 and 2 in year 5. Over two thirds of the total roll are boys. All pupils have Statements of Special Educational Needs, and these identify a range of specific difficulties; such as emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Three pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are three looked after children and the majority of pupils come from socially deprived backgrounds.

An ongoing review of special educational needs in Gloucestershire has created a very insecure context for the school, since it has been threatened with closure twice in the recent past. Its future still remains uncertain. In addition, the school suffered two serious fires as the result of arson attacks in June 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school, where pupils make impressive progress. Teaching and learning are consistently very good across the school, because of the excellent teamwork between teachers and their very able learning support workers (LSWs).

The school is very well managed at all levels. The headteacher has provided exemplary leadership during a very difficult period in the school's history, working in very effective partnership with her very able assistant headteachers. Pupils' personal development is excellent, because of highly focused support and encouragement from all staff. The school provides a very good range of learning experiences, including many additional activities outside normal hours, which are carefully and sensitively planned to meet the very diverse needs of the whole school population. It provides very good value for money.

There have been significant improvements across the school since the last inspection, most notably in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, the accommodation and learning resources and the way it checks how well it is doing. This overall improvement has been achieved in the context of a more challenging and needy pupil population. The school knows itself extremely well and plans very successfully to ensure its continuous improvement. It does not rest on its laurels and is very well placed to effect further significant progress, once its future is assured.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement that have not been already identified by the school and covered very effectively in its excellent development plan. These include improving provision for its changing population, expanding learning technology across the school and further developing its working partnerships with mainstream schools.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is very good, with some individual excellence. Pupils often arrive at the school late in their school careers, very much behind in their studies, because of earlier negative experiences of failure in mainstream schools. Belmont successfully helps them to learn how to learn, to believe in their capabilities and to develop their basic skills. The excellent quality of the provision ensures that their progress is very good and in some cases exemplary, so that, in their final year, many of them achieve results in GCSE and other exams that, when they arrived, would have been beyond their dreams. The very small group of younger primary aged pupils get off to a very good start and make very good progress in preparation for moving up into the secondary department. There are no differences between the achievements of girls and boys, pupils with particular needs or those from minority ethnic groups, so that all do as well as they can.

Significant improvements have been made in recent years, most particularly in relation to achievements in the ever widening range of accredited courses. This now ensures that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their studies, training or working life. Parents are highly appreciative of these outcomes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal and social development of pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils' relationships with all staff are excellent, and they feel safe and behave very well. Every pupil contributes, therefore taking greater responsibility for his or her actions. Pupils become increasingly mature and responsible as they move through the school. In this they are helped by the clear guidelines for behaviour, the excellent role models provided by staff and their very high expectations that pupils will behave very well and show respect to each other. Pupils take pride in being identified as the headteacher's 'pupil of the term' and also when their behaviour and their effort over the previous month is recognised through the granting of an award.

Pupils have a keen awareness of their responsibilities to the wider community and take part in a number of local initiatives, such as the Cheltenham tidy group and the Borough Council Countryside Rangers. They are justifiably proud of gaining the 'highly commended' award last year from the Cheltenham in Bloom group for the school's wildlife garden. The active involvement of staff in exchanges to other countries, (last year to Canada, South Africa, Lithuania and Hungary), as well as the links with schools overseas, gives pupils first hand information of different cultures and traditions. The new garden with its displays from countries in four different continents is an innovative way of extending pupils' knowledge of life in different places.

Overall, attendance is satisfactory and most of the pupils attend very well. However, despite the best efforts of the school, a very small number do not attend regularly. Their absences have a disproportionate impact on the overall figure for attendance, which is, consequently, below the national average.

The school encourages the pursuit of a healthy life style and promotes this very well in a number of ways. It is part of the Gloucestershire healthy schools partnership and pupils receive good advice on healthy eating. The necessity for being active as part of a healthy life style is made clear during lessons in physical education. Pupils gain considerable benefit from participating in lunch time clubs and in competitions against other schools in the region. They recognise the importance of economic well being in life after school through taking part in the very strong programme for work related learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is very good overall, as reflected in the progress that all pupils make. Some of the lessons observed during the inspection were excellent and pupils' work, especially their writing, indicates the consistency of this quality across the school. Outstanding relationships between all staff and pupils, combined with highly effective behaviour management strategies, ensure that classrooms are civilised and highly productive places. As a result, pupils are enabled to learn very successfully. Teaching is positive and very well informed by extremely careful and sensitive planning. This is based on highly detailed individual pupil records, to meet the full range of needs in each class. Through the use of imaginative materials and thoughtful methods, pupils are engaged by their lessons, and they experience success.

Whilst the necessary basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are very well taught, pupils are equally effectively helped to develop their creative and physical talents. Beautifully displayed examples of pupils' stunning artwork around the school, together with records of individual and collective sporting prowess attest to this.

Teachers and LSWs regularly assess the progress that pupils are making and encourage them, in turn, to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing. This shared, collaborative approach to supporting learning is the key to the school's success.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

A highly relevant curriculum offers pupils a broad experience of all subjects. Staff work very well together to ensure that learning activities are enjoyable and productive. A very wide range of additional opportunities, such as thinking skills lessons, very well planned visits into the community and work with visiting artists, musicians and sports coaches, excite and motivate pupils. The school also provides clubs and additional facilities to enhance pupils' learning. This is exemplified by the very productive personal development and dance projects that bring together students from Cheltenham Ladies College and girls in the school.

Primary aged pupils are provided with a suitable and effective learning programme. At the other end of the school, exemplary provision is made to enable all pupils to leave school with accredited qualifications appropriate to their needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are cared for very well. They say that they feel safe and secure at school. Child protection procedures are very good, and staff and pupils are clear about the procedures they need to follow in dealing with any incident. The nomination by pupils of a

preferred adult that they can easily talk to is an innovative and important channel for communication. Risk assessments for lessons and for pupils' visits outside of school are detailed and routinely evaluated.

Academic progress and personal development are tracked very effectively. Targets in individual education plans are sharp and clearly show what pupils need to do to improve. The tracking procedures record progress and detailed information that is used very well in planning lessons to meet the learning needs of all pupils. The wide range of accreditation available to pupils in Year 11 means that the progress pupils make in their learning during their time at school is reflected very well in the awards they gain.

Statutory requirements relating to pupils with special educational needs are met in full. For the increasing number of pupils with communication difficulties, the staff's own expertise in specific language programmes is providing pupils with most of the specialist help they need. This is particularly important, because the school receives less guidance from speech and language therapists than is the case in many equivalent schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is led and managed in an exemplary manner. The headteacher has provided outstanding leadership during the continuing uncertainty about the school's future, and, particularly, following the trauma of the two fires. She has a clear vision about how the school should develop, which is shared by all her staff. Consequently, the capacity for shaping the school according to this vision is excellent. The assistant headteachers are very competent, and provide considerable support to the headteacher. As a result, the school is calm, ordered and very well organised, providing pupils and staff with clear opportunities always to do their best. This has been very well expressed in a pupil's poem:

'(The school) is a place for learning
And a place for turning
Into the proud person you
will be'.

The headteacher was appointed after the last inspection, and, since then, there has been considerable development. For example, the procedures for checking the work of the school are now rigorous and the information gained is linked very well to planning for further improvement.

Governance is also outstanding. Over the last few years, governors have represented the school very effectively in the ongoing debate about revised provision for pupils with special educational needs in the county. Despite this considerable call on their time, they have continued to meet their primary responsibilities to the school very successfully. Through the very good information that they get and their regular visits to school, they have a clear idea of its strengths and the areas which would benefit from further development.

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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?	1	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	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. During the short time we were with you we really enjoyed watching you learn. It was helpful that you talked to us about your work and how you feel about your school so honestly and confidently. We were also able to talk to your headteacher and other staff and to look around the lovely buildings and grounds, where we saw many examples of your very good work displayed. It was especially pleasing to see how well the damage from the terrible fires has been dealt with. We would not have known about it unless we had been told.

What we particularly liked about your school

- You behave very well and are kind and considerate to each other.
- You work extremely hard for your teachers and support staff, who do their very best to help you learn, no matter what your difficulties are.
- In your last year, you do very well in your exams, and leave as mature young adults, very well prepared for the next stage of your life.
- Your excellent headteacher runs the school very well, because she makes sure that she knows you and your work and listens carefully to what you have to say.
- Your parents and carers are right to think that you go to a very special school. You have good reason to be proud of it.

We did not find anything important that needed doing, because the headteacher, other teachers and governors already know what the school does well and what it needs to do to get even better. We were impressed that, through your school council, you have helped them very well with this work. We are very confident that you can all carry on working successfully together.