



The Bridge School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134030
LEA Islington LEA
Inspection number 282425
Inspection dates 29 November 2005 to 30 November 2005
Reporting inspector Margaret Goodchild AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	75 Prebend Street
School category	Community		London
Age range of pupils	2 to 19		N1 8PW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02072268223
Number on roll	125	Fax number	02072722032
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr J Wolger

Age group 2 to 19	Inspection dates 29 November 2005 - 30 November 2005	Inspection number 282425
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Bridge is a new school - being an amalgamation of two previous special schools - and operates on three separate sites. Building has started on a new, purpose-built school to replace the existing accommodation which is inadequate. Nearly all the pupils have a statement of special educational needs for autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties or profound learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils with complex needs is increasing and all pupils have severe communication and interaction difficulties. Over a third also exhibit challenging behaviour and a significant number have additional physical disabilities. Most pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and a high proportion are eligible for free school meals. The school operates a Professional Training Centre, using the expertise of its own staff and external lecturers to provide training for teachers. It also oversees a variety of behavioural programmes, funded partly by CEA@Islington, and provides an outreach service to support other schools in the area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspection findings confirm the judgement of senior staff and parents that this is an outstanding school. It provides good value for money. Pupils are cared for extremely well and make outstanding progress in their personal development. The curriculum is matched very closely to the needs of different groups of pupils and the school is outstanding in the way that it provides for many of the pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The promotion of pupils' creative development - across art, dance and drama - is excellent. The school makes exceptionally good use of the local and wider community to enrich pupils' learning experiences. The nursery classes are very effective in meeting children's needs. The school is working to improve the way that it organises and uses information about how well pupils are doing. It keeps detailed records of pupils' attainment and uses these effectively but its methods are unduly time consuming. The exceptionally clear direction and vision provided by the headteacher makes a very difficult situation - of being based on three sites that are miles apart - work well. The headteacher is ably supported by the heads of each site and other managers, and high expectations are backed up by rigorous checking of the school's effectiveness. The school's capacity to develop further in the short term is, necessarily, hampered to some extent by the prolonged period of change that it is going through and weaknesses in its existing accommodation. The potential for improvement once it is operating in better quality accommodation is very good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good and it provides very well for the needs of all its students. Achievement is very good and, even though standards are low, students meet with a good level of success in relevant qualifications. Teachers make innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support students with complex difficulties in making choices and expressing themselves. The quality of care is very high and the school expects sixth form students to become independent, providing opportunities such as work experience to prepare them very well for life when they leave.

What the school should do to improve further

* Introduce a more efficient way of tracking pupils' progress and analysing information about how well pupils are doing.* Continue to fine-tune organisation and the roles of managers in preparation for the move to new premises.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The nature of pupils' difficulties means that standards are very low but overall achievement is outstanding. Pupils make very good progress towards individual targets

that are appropriately challenging, and make exceptionally good progress in developing their communication skills. This is because teachers work closely with the speech and language therapist and pupils learn to use symbols, signing and communication aids. Throughout the school, many pupils make clear progress in reading, and demonstrate a range of skills from recognising symbols to reading whole books. Most pupils with severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders are able to verbalise a few words and build sentences using pictures. The most able pupils are articulate and confident in expressing their ideas. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make very good progress in understanding cause and effect and use this connection to make real choices. Progress in numeracy is good across the school as a whole and exceptionally good in some lessons. Progress is very good in personal, social and health education. Pupils make exceptional progress in art, drama, dance and other creative activities. They produce high quality artwork in two and three dimensions, take part in live dance performances, enter competitions and participate in projects with a variety of mainstream primary and secondary schools. Older pupils embark on the ASDAN course and follow it through successfully: all those who left last year gained accreditation in Towards Independence.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are exceptionally good. Pupils are happy and confident and show an interest in activities. Attendance is below average largely because of pupils having time off for medical reasons, but parents say that their children love coming to school. Pupils are made to feel valued and develop high self-esteem. Although some pupils behave in a challenging way, behaviour is good overall because staff are very skilled in managing difficult behaviour. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Pupils learn to stay healthy and take part in a range of physical activities, sometimes with visiting specialists. It is clear that pupils enjoy all that the school has to offer and they benefit enormously from their involvement in the community and with other schools. Older pupils are given increasing opportunities to take responsibility, including taking part in work experience, and all pupils are encouraged to make decisions for themselves. They become as independent as possible, which stands them in very good stead for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is nearly always at least good and the school has a number of excellent teachers. Teamwork between staff is strong and teaching assistants are used very well. Parents are very appreciative of the way teachers communicate with them, keeping them regularly informed about how their children are doing. There are a number of examples of exceptional teaching across the three sites. The use of ICT is very effective throughout the school. With younger pupils, for instance, it is used to involve them

in storytelling. Teachers generally manage the behaviour of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders really skilfully and where teaching is excellent, they use resources in a highly imaginative way to assist these pupils in understanding and communicating. The inspirational teaching of art, dance and drama by specialist teachers enables pupils to produce work of a high quality. Where teaching is good and occasionally merely satisfactory, the quality of interaction between adults and pupils is less well developed than in the best lessons and time is not used as well as it could be. The school collects a wealth of information about what pupils can do and uses this to check how much progress they are making. Although information is used well to set targets for individual pupils, the organisation of assessment is time consuming and involves a great deal of paperwork.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The organisation of pupils into classes that are determined by the nature of their special educational needs means that learning is matched very closely to pupils' difficulties and potential. This has a strongly positive effect on their achievement and development. Pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties are provided with opportunities to explore the boundaries of their sensory awareness and develop a range of thinking skills which support them in making meaningful choices. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders learn in a calm, structured environment that helps them to concentrate and organise themselves in a way that minimises their difficulties. Parents say that their children's days are 'packed with learning and enjoyable activities'. This is partly because the school is exceptionally good at using resources available in the local and wider community to stimulate and enrich pupils' learning. Opportunities for pupils to go on educational visits are excellent and the school welcomes a large number of visitors who broaden pupils' horizons. Pupils are given outstanding opportunities to develop their creativity. They work with specialists in art, dance and drama, and have exciting opportunities to take part in drama and dance performances, including an annual performance at Sadlers Wells, as well as being involved in arts festivals and workshops with mainstream schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school cares exceptionally well for its pupils and makes a real difference in their lives. Pupils have trusting relationships with the adults who care for them and the school ensures that pupils are protected from harm. The level of commitment amongst the staff and joint working with a very wide range of therapists and other agencies enables the school to meet even the most extreme needs. The very favourable staffing level means that pupils receive a great deal of individual attention. A parent who expressed gratitude for the care provided described the staff as 'angels without wings' and parents as a whole are extremely satisfied with the way the school guides and supports their children. It works very closely also with parents, providing them with advice and strategies for managing their children at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and a very clear vision for the school. Systems for checking the quality of the school's work are rigorous, the school takes parents' views into account and expectations are high. Senior managers have a thorough knowledge of the work of each of the three sites and are accurate in their evaluation of the school's effectiveness. There are rigorous systems for checking the quality of teaching, the school has a very favourable staffing level and staff are supported very well in developing their skills. Close links have been established with a number of mainstream schools and colleges, which extend the learning experiences, open to pupils. Pupils are treated equally and included as much as possible. A great deal of time and energy, necessarily, goes into providing high quality education and care within inadequate accommodation on three sites that are geographically far apart. Senior staff have managed change very effectively and are planning thoroughly for the move to new premises. The governing body works very closely with staff in making decisions about future developments and supports the school very effectively.

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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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

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 helping me to feel so welcome at your school. I enjoyed seeing all the interesting things you do and learnt a great deal about your school.

These are some of the things I particularly liked about your school: * Your teachers and teaching assistants care for you extremely well and that helps you to feel safe and to grow in confidence. * Those of you with autistic spectrum disorders are often taught exceptionally well and this helps you to make excellent progress. * You have fantastic opportunities to be creative, in art, dance and drama. I really loved the artwork that was on display at the Woodbridge and Elthorne sites. It made me wish I had time to join in! * You have lots of exciting opportunities to go on trips, in the local community but also as far afield as France, and go to lots of places in London. I could see that visitors to the school also make learning especially interesting for you. * Your headteacher is doing an excellent job and the heads at each of the sites support him really well. Together, they work very hard to make the school as good as possible for you.

Your teachers keep detailed records about how well you are doing but I have asked them to find a better way of doing this. As the school is preparing to move to lovely new buildings, they also have a lot to do to make sure that everything is ready in time. I hope you continue to enjoy your time at The Bridge.