

Bents Green School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107169
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	287731
Inspection dates	31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	120
6th form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Gibson
Headteacher	Mrs A Scott-Jones
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2002
School address	Ringinglow Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S11 7TB
Telephone number	0114 2363545
Fax number	0114 2621904

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	31 January –1 February 2007
Inspection number	287731

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school for students with complex communication and interaction difficulties. The majority of students have autistic spectrum disorders and most also have moderate learning difficulties. Many have additional medical problems or social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Most students are from White British backgrounds. A few are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The local authority looks after a very small number of students. Currently, only 16 students are girls. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools standard, the local careers standards and won a national award for sex and relationships education. The sixth form opened in 2002. All sixth form students have autistic spectrum disorders and only stay on at school if they are not ready to cope with college. The school's residential unit provides overnight accommodation. Around one third of the students stay for one or two weekday nights per week during term time. The provision is inspected annually by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The Friends of Bents Green provide holiday and Saturday clubs for students from this and other schools.

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, confirming overall the school's view of itself. It provides outstanding value for money. All staff work together to create, in the words of parents, 'a consistent and supportive ethos'. As a result, students say, 'it's a really nice place to be' and 'you can always count on a teacher'. Students' personal development is exceptional, rooted in the school's utter commitment to equipping them in every way for adult life. Approaches and programmes are devised to suit their particular needs. Consequently, they develop the communication skills and self-confidence needed to cope with challenges such as asking in shops for precisely what they want, rather than picking it up in a supermarket. They are clear about healthy lifestyles and enjoy sport greatly. Regular, carefully planned outings during the day or in the residential setting contribute to students' clear understanding of how to stay safe. Students make exceptional progress in managing their own behaviour. They become increasingly able to accept responsibility and to be as independent as possible. The outstanding curriculum provides exceptional opportunities for students to learn about the world of work, helping to ensure that they are prepared exceptionally well for their lives after school. Care, guidance and support are all extremely effective. Because they feel safe, students are willing to tackle new experiences and cooperate with others. The boarding provision is good overall and has many strengths. The most recent CSCI report highlights a need to update the accommodation.

Owing to students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards in the school are very low. However, achievement is outstanding throughout the school, especially in speaking and listening, reading and mathematics. Progress in writing, while very good, is a little slower. This remarkable achievement is linked closely to students' extremely good personal development, but is chiefly the product of outstanding teaching. Staff's very detailed knowledge of each student's learning and emotional needs is gathered through comprehensive assessment procedures. Teachers adapt lessons consistently well to enable individuals to move forward at the pace that suits them best, helping them to meet their targets for learning and personal development.

After describing the school as 'excellent', one parent noted understandably that 'None of this would be assured to the same extent without the strong leadership of the headteacher.' Leadership and management are first-rate, because all staff share the headteacher's determination to achieve excellence. They demonstrate this by constantly seeking to meet students' needs effectively. As a result, there has been outstanding improvement since the previous inspection and the school's capacity to continue to develop is equally strong. Self-evaluation is thorough and wide ranging, providing a very accurate view of the school's strengths and identifying the next steps to improve further. This is a very outward-looking and ambitious school, which meets its students' complex and diverse needs exceptionally well.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Learners' progress and achievement are exceptional. They gain a broad range of accreditation, including Entry Level certificates in such relevant topics as healthy lifestyles and applying for jobs and courses. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum are outstanding. Together, they give learners the skills and confidence to enable them to move on successfully to further education or employment. Learners appreciate that the sixth form is different from

the rest of the school, because they spend more time off-site, at further education colleges, for example. Overnight stays in the residential setting enable all learners to practise independent living skills and learn to be more autonomous. Their personal development is outstanding. The school judges leadership and management of the sixth form to be good. Although its manager has not long been in post, highly effective systems are in place to ensure that leadership and management are actually outstanding.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The draft 2006 CSCI report indicates that the vast majority of National Minimum Standards are met or exceeded. However, the accommodation is in need of modernisation and refurbishment. There are no outstanding recommendations from the previous report. The boarding provision contributes very strongly to the personal development of the students who stay overnight. Regular outings, for example to cinemas or shopping centres, provide excellent opportunities for students to develop social skills. The care staff promote students' enjoyment and achievement exceptionally well, aided by very strong links with teachers and students' homes. Students especially like the varied activities and socialising with friends and staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' written communication skills in all subjects.
- Carry out the recommendations of the most recent CSCI report, especially with regard to improving the residential accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

When they join the school, students are working at levels very much lower than those found in mainstream schools. They make outstanding progress in mathematics and in English overall, although progress is slower in writing and the levels students reach are not quite as high. The school sets very challenging targets for each student and these are nearly always met. Girls and boys make equally rapid progress. The same is true of the very few from minority ethnic groups, those with English as an additional language or students looked after by the local authority. Students with the most complex learning difficulties move forward in very small steps, but their achievement is just as outstanding as the highest-attaining students. By the end of Year 11, all students are very successful in a variety of externally accredited courses. Depending on their ability, they gain, for example, Assessment and Qualifications Alliance Units, Entry Level certificates, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network awards, Junior Sports Leader awards or GCSE passes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students learn to appreciate a very wide range of music and art and they regularly have time to reflect on issues during religious education lessons. They develop a keen understanding of how they should behave. As a result, staff seldom need to intervene to ensure fair play, for example, during lunchtime

games. Behaviour is outstanding. Students appreciate that staff always deal seriously with the rare occasions of bullying. During school lunch and meals in the residential setting, students make choices and demonstrate their knowledge of healthy eating. They become very aware of how to stay safe. An assembly led by Key Stage 4 students with the most complex needs included good advice such as 'remain seated until the bus has stopped'. Attendance is above average, reflecting students' enormous enjoyment of school. They do a great deal to help each other, the staff and the wider community. Students mature into confident young people, extremely well prepared for their lives beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

All staff members of classroom teams share the same very high aspirations for students' personal development and achievement. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very closely to identify ways forward for each student. They use consistent approaches, for example, when discouraging a particular type of behaviour or helping students to understand how they can improve. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Staff make it very clear that each student is valued, boosting students' self-esteem and prompting them to play a full part in lessons. Teachers' in-depth knowledge of their subjects enables them to plan highly relevant activities which tackle students' particular barriers to learning. They regularly take advantage of opportunities to promote writing, but these are not quite as extensive or as effective as they could be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is constantly developing in order to keep pace with students increasingly complex and varied needs. There is always a clear and highly relevant emphasis on literacy, numeracy and all aspects of personal, social and health education. Work-related learning is an exceptionally strong and successful feature of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Much of the work of these students is accredited and is supported by very strong links with mainstream schools. These partnerships enable, for example, individual students to follow GCSE courses. A huge range of visits enriches learning in school. For instance, students have performed at the Royal Albert Hall and watched performances at Covent Garden, supporting their understanding of musical performance and their cultural development. The physical education curriculum is very wide ranging, enhanced by visiting coaches and partnerships with other schools. In addition to the boarding provision, students take part in residential visits offering new experiences and developing independence skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are cared for extremely well. Very secure and comprehensive arrangements to safeguard them involve teaching and residential staff. Students say that they feel safe and know what to

do if worried. Each student's 'communication passport' informs all staff, including school transport staff, about their needs and how best to meet them. A wide range of agencies works very closely with the school to add to the support for students and their families. Great care is taken to ensure that the social needs of the small number of girls are met. Planning for students' futures is very thorough, with the full involvement of students and their families. Students' academic progress is tracked rigorously and assessment information is analysed thoroughly. The outcomes of these systems are used in a variety of ways in order to ensure that individuals and groups make the best possible progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher's leadership is extremely well informed, thoughtful and effective. Nothing about the school is left to chance. For instance, the arrangements to induct new leaders into their roles fill them with confidence while ensuring that standards never slip. The senior team brings a breadth of expertise together with enthusiasm and commitment to excellence. This is seen in the school's current drive towards specialist status for communication and interaction. Monitoring arrangements are rigorous and effective, with outcomes leading directly to the school's plan for improvement and hence to raising standards. The views of all stakeholders are sought and acted on. Parents' views are extremely positive about everything the school does. Governors are very clear about what the school does well. Through committees and working parties which consider, for example, the implications of the projected expansion of the sixth form, governors provide significant support and challenge.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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 effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	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	2	
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when we visited your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about the school and residential provision. This letter is to tell you what we found out about the school.

You told us that you are happy at school and that you like a lot of things about it. We think that your teachers do an excellent job of helping you to get ready for adult life. One way they do this is by arranging for you to get out and about, so you get used to meeting new people. We were very impressed with your behaviour and how you help each other and the staff.

You make excellent progress in your learning, because your teachers are extremely good at their job. We think your writing could be slightly better and we've asked your teachers to make sure you get lots of chances to practise and improve. You can help by trying extra hard with your writing. We know that you feel safe in school and we agree that you are cared for very well indeed. Those of you who stay overnight enjoy it very much. The bedrooms and bathrooms are a bit out of date and we want the school to improve them.

Your headteacher does an excellent job of leading the school and making sure you all have the best possible education. Your parents and carers think you go to an outstanding school and we agree with them.

Our best wishes to you all.