



Brimble Hill Special School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126556
Local Authority Swindon
Inspection number 293586
Inspection date 30 January 2007
Reporting inspector Michael Farrell

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

Type of school	Special	School address	North Swindon Learning Campus Tadpole Lane, Red House Swindon SN25 2NB
School category	Community	Telephone number	01793 707577
Age range of pupils	2-11	Fax number	01793 707579
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair	David Easter
Number on roll (school)	59	Headteacher	R K Walker
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most of the children educated at Brimble Hill Special School experience severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or communication difficulties and a smaller number have autism. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. Brimble Hill Special School recently moved to new purpose built premises on a learning campus it shares with a mainstream primary, mainstream secondary and a secondary special school. Advisory teachers for visual impairment and for alternative and augmentative communication who work across the local authority are based in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brimble Hill is a good school. This confirms the school's own judgement and indicates that the good quality of the provision has been maintained since the previous inspection. Leadership and management are good. The commitment of the headteacher and staff has ensured that the school has maintained its effectiveness over the several years when time consuming negotiations and preparation were taking place preparing the school for moving to its new site in November 2006. The spacious custom-built premises enhance provision considerably although there are still some building and maintenance problems the school is working to resolve. The school's self-evaluation is accurate although it cannot yet compare its performance with similar schools because it has not set up systems to do this. The school is aware of its areas of strength and where it can improve. Leadership responsibilities are suitably dispersed across senior staff who effectively monitor the school's performance. Governance is satisfactory but not all members of the governing body visit the school often enough to gain a really clear picture of its provision. The school is well placed to improve further, now that it is able to capitalise on the opportunities provided by the learning campus shared with other schools.

While the standards of attainment of pupils are very low compared with the national average because of their learning difficulties and disabilities, achievement is good. Pupils in the combined nursery and reception group enjoy their work and make good progress because teaching and learning are very well organised, assessments are clear and the care and support for pupils are strong.

Teaching and learning are good. The good teaching and patient behaviour management for pupils, especially those with autistic spectrum disorder, enable pupils to feel secure, settle quickly and make good progress. However time is not always used effectively, especially in the early part of the day. Throughout the school, alternative means of communication including manual signing, pictorial symbols and electronic devices are used very effectively. The curriculum is effective and provides a good range and balance of activities including good use of the local community.

The good care, guidance and support of pupils, supported by careful assessments, enable them to feel safe, make healthy choices, for example in their eating, enjoy what the school provides and take part in the school community. Parents value the school and are very positive in their views saying, 'I trust the staff' and 'I love the new school'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure time is fully used at the beginning of the day to maximise learning.
- Use information on pupils' progress more fully by comparing standards with other similar schools.
- Ensure all governors have up-to-date first-hand knowledge of the school through regular visits.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although pupils' attainment is much lower than that for other pupils of the same age because of their learning difficulties and disabilities, their achievement and progress are good. Children join the nursery age/ reception group where they make good progress and this is maintained as they move through the school and continue to progress very well.

Progress is particularly strong in communication where the school's emphasis on augmentative and alternative communication systems benefits pupils. In numeracy, progress is also good. Boys and girls and pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds progress equally well. While older pupils with profound and severe learning difficulties still make good progress, this is slower than it should be because time is not being fully used at the beginning of the first session of the day.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school works effectively to develop positive attitudes and children respond well showing many signs that they enjoy school. For example pupils arrive at school happy to be there and show delight in assemblies. Behaviour in lessons is good and any unsettled or challenging behaviour is quickly resolved. Playtimes are enjoyable for the pupils and they move around the school safely, supervised and assisted as necessary. Rates of attendance are high, the main reason for absence being the need for medical treatment.

Pupils benefit from the school's efforts to promote their health through offering choices of healthy foods and, for those requiring them, maintaining carefully prepared health care plans. They enjoy various physical activities including hydrotherapy and riding for the disabled. Pupils feel safe in school, for example pupils with autistic spectrum disorder respond well to the signals that their activities are to change and are therefore less anxious. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development overall is good. Social and moral development is particularly strong and pupils are prepared well for life in a multicultural society, for example thorough work in religious education. Pupils contribute to the school community, for example by helping with class jobs such as taking the register or tidying. Pupils are given many opportunities to communicate and make choices throughout the day. The school uses the local community well to support learning, for example through visits to local shops, parks and other places of interest. The satisfactory economic well-being of pupils is encouraged by pupils working in groups and helping with tasks such as tidying. However, there is no school council from which, despite the communication difficulties of many, pupils could learn to assert themselves and make their views known more clearly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In the groups for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, teachers use interesting resources and lessons are structured suitably to give them a sense of security that helps them manage changes of activity without undue anxiety and encourages good progress. For example, using visual timetables and clearly laid out work enable pupils to tackle activities confidently. Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely together.

Teachers, drawing on clear assessment information, appropriately develop medium term planning to help ensure work is pitched at the right level for pupils whose attainment may be quite varied, particularly in individual work sessions. Information and communication technology is effectively used. For younger pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, lesson time is fully used, a rich variety of resources is effectively employed, and sessions move at a good pace, leading to good progress. In sessions led by therapists where the pace and enthusiasm of the sessions was well supported by teachers and teaching assistants, time was fully used. However, in several groups, teaching time in the early part of the first morning sessions, especially for older pupils, is not used as effectively as it should be to support learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum offers a good variety and balance of activities that are adapted according to the particular special educational needs of pupils. For example suitable materials and activities are provided for pupils with visual impairment, activities are carefully structured for pupils with autism, and sensory development is emphasised for pupils with profound and severe learning difficulties. The focus of the curriculum is appropriately on communication, literacy, numeracy and personal and social development. Other curriculum subject areas are carefully planned as topics.

The contribution of therapists forms an important part of the curriculum, for example in music and communication. Visits to the local community enhance learning well and often reinforce the work that has been done on a particular topic, for example a visit to an aquarium following topic work about fish. Since the school has moved to its new premises, after-school clubs have not yet been reinstated and the school recognises this as a requirement for action.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides an ethos which is encouraging, positive and appreciated by parents. There is a safe and caring environment in which pupils enjoy their education. Effective guidance is given in lessons and elsewhere to support good behaviour including through

the use of individual support plans. Targets for behaviour reflect common sense and the plans clearly set out effective strategies. Opportunities for working with other agencies and therapists are well developed.

Policies and child protection procedures are clear and consistent, an improvement since the previous inspection when staff were not sufficiently clear about procedures. Suitable risk assessments are undertaken. Targets in individual education plans are clear and appropriate and pupils are well supported in reaching these. Pupils are guided about what they are learning and what they need to do to successfully carry out tasks on a continuing basis.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a clear view of the direction of the school and has, with senior staff, worked hard to bring to fruition the move to the new premises with all the opportunities this now offers. Middle managers contribute effectively in their various roles. Throughout several years of planning and preparing for the move to the new premises, senior staff have managed to maintain standards in all areas of school life. Staff care greatly about their work and this is reflected in the very positive views of parents who say they love the new school and trust the staff. The roles of staff are clear and there is a practical approach to getting things done.

The school effectively monitors standards and teaching and learning, and the process of performance management is thorough and well embedded. The school tracks the progress of pupils, especially in communication, literacy and numeracy, supplementing data from 'performance scales' with more detailed teacher assessments. It does not yet compare pupils' achievement with that of similar special schools to explore where standards can be driven higher.

The chairperson of governors is very committed to the school and knows its strengths and weaknesses well and there have been some improvements in the functioning of the governing body since the previous inspection. However, not all the members of the governing body visit the school often enough to gain a clear, hands-on picture of provision.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

I visited your school with another inspector and wanted to thank you for letting us come into your lessons.

We found there were a lot of good things about your school:

- You work hard and learn well.
- You behave well and obviously enjoy coming to school.
- The school gives you an interesting range of activities.
- The teaching is good, all the staff work hard and the school is well led.
- The school cares for you well.

There are some things the school could do even better and we have asked that:

- staff make sure that in morning sessions for older pupils, time is well used
- governors become more involved in watching over what the school does and visit you more
- the school looks at how well other similar schools are doing and learns from this.

Thank you again and good luck for the future.