

Bracken Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122961
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Inspection number	301319
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	84
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrej Machalski
Headteacher	Mr Ron McCrossen
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Chartwell Road Kirkby-in-Ashfield Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG17 7HZ
Telephone number	01623 477 268
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bracken Hill is a small special school for pupils with a range of learning difficulties. The majority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties and a significant minority have severe learning difficulties; a few have autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds but overall the level of social and economic disadvantage is above average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bracken Hill is a good, effective and happy school where pupils achieve well in their learning and make outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being. Standards are well below those found nationally due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties. Parents are very positive about all aspects of the school. They have nothing but praise for the good quality teaching and outstanding care, guidance and support which help their children prepare so well for their futures. Pupils love coming to school and enjoy every aspect of their day, whether it be work experience in the local park, a challenging science lesson or performing in productions for the community. Leadership and management are good overall. The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher who, with excellent support from governors and the contribution of his deputy, has overseen a continuous drive for improvement.

Teaching is of a consistently good quality and lessons are engaging and fun. This leads to excellent behaviour from pupils. Lessons are usually planned well to meet pupils' different needs and as a result most achieve well over time. Nevertheless in a very small minority of lessons, work is not well matched to pupils' different needs, especially the more able.

The schools' self-evaluation is used effectively to raise standards and ensure that pupils make good progress. However the use of information to gauge how well different groups of pupils are doing is more limited. Managers have a good idea of how well pupils do in different subjects but are less clear about the relative progress of different ability groups. This means that the school cannot fine tune its provision to ensure that all needs are being met fully. Pupils do well in their academic work because the guidance to help individual pupils achieve challenging targets is good, their individual progress is carefully tracked and effective support is given to those falling behind. In addition, there are extensive and excellent links with agencies and other organisations to support pupils personally and academically.

The outstanding curriculum enables many pupils to make excellent progress in several subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT), the creative arts, science and physical education. It ensures that pupils have good awareness of healthy living and an outstanding awareness of how to be safe. The range of activities and projects to bring learning alive is excellent and pupils' art work is stunning. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community and show considerable care for each other. The school council is especially effective and has achieved several changes in the school, including improvements to the playground facilities and a more healthy tuck shop. Pupils thrive at the school and grow significantly in confidence, ready to take their place in the wider world.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is equally effective and students progress and achieve well in their subjects and courses. Much of the provision is identical to that of the main school, including the excellent provision for students' care, guidance and support and their resulting outstanding personal development and well-being. Although in a few lessons more able students are not challenged sufficiently, their results show that they do well overall. This is because, alongside careful guidance, the curriculum is outstanding, especially in the rich variety of activities to keep students highly motivated and achieving well. Activities include the Duke of Edinburgh bronze and silver awards and, for some, courses at a local farm, from which they gain greatly and

thoroughly enjoy. Students leave the sixth form as mature and confident young people who are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all lessons are planned to meet the different needs of pupils and students, especially the more able.
- Improve the way the information on learner's progress is analysed so that managers can easily see differences in the rate of progress between different groups of learners, to better meet the needs of everyone.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils in all age groups, of all abilities and with all types of learning difficulties make good progress overall. Progress and achievement in the sixth form are good and students make good strides in their coursework. Progress is good in most subjects including the core subjects of English and mathematics due to consistently good teaching in these subjects. There is some outstanding progress in several subjects where the high quality of the curriculum makes a major contribution to results. Progress for pupils aged 11 to 14 in the resistant material element of design and technology is satisfactory because teaching is no better than satisfactory in this subject. By the end of Year 11 pupils leave with an increasingly good range of qualifications. Due to some good work with the Connexions service, all pupils successfully transfer to the sixth form, college or employment and do well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' and sixth form students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They show a keen understanding and appreciation of the differences between people and frequently express their sense of wonder at the interesting things they are learning. They thoroughly enjoy learning and this is reflected in their good attendance and high levels of participation in after-school clubs. Pupils and students are supported through the wider curriculum to be very sensitive to the needs of others and make excellent contributions to the community, raising funds for several charities, and looking after others in the playground. Older pupils act as 'peer mentors' and work as volunteer helpers in listening to young pupils reading in their mainstream schools. The majority of pupils and students take full advantage of the school's excellent provision for exercise and healthy eating, although a few still prefer crisps and fizzy drinks to the healthy school lunches. They also show a very strong awareness of how to be safe and incidents of bullying and unsafe behaviour are rare. Behaviour has improved significantly in the last year due to the effective training undertaken by staff and is now outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are many strengths in teaching throughout the school and sixth form and, although good overall, a proportion of lessons are regularly outstanding. The excellent relationships and high quality behaviour management lead to excellent behaviour. A wide range of interesting activities keeps pupils and students engaged and contributes to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils and students typically report that 'Teachers help us a lot, they are all good here.' Pupils are successfully encouraged to work together. Teachers use technology, including interactive whiteboards and computers, very well to support learning and make it interesting. The majority of lessons are well planned, based upon thorough assessment, to ensure that every pupil is working to the best of their ability. There is good guidance, where challenging individual targets are set which pupils and students understand well. In a few lessons in all age groups, the work is not well matched to meet the needs of all pupils or students and for some, especially the more able, their learning is slowed as a result. In Years 3 to 6, for example, more able pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress in number work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There are excellent opportunities to enrich pupils' and students' learning, through a wide range of clubs, visits and visitors to the school, which include professional coaches, artists and community representatives. The curriculum is planned very effectively to accommodate the wide range of pupils' and students' different learning needs and difficulties. The youngest pupils learn subjects through topics and themes and the older pupils and students in the sixth form have very good opportunities to take a range of accredited courses. These include certificates of achievement, various ASDAN awards, entry level certificates and GCSEs in mathematics, art and science. There is a very strong focus on literacy and numeracy, and provision for ICT is exceptional. Outstanding opportunities for work-related learning include a very good range of vocational courses at a local college, such as painting and decorating, motor vehicle maintenance, hairdressing and horticulture. Consistently good careers advice and individualised work experience placements in pupils' and students' local communities enhance their prospects. Consequently, pupils' and students' preparation for their future economic well-being is excellent.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care guidance and support are outstanding. Pupils and sixth form students receive very good support from staff, therapists and outside professionals. The school provides excellent personalised care and support for pupils, students and their families, visiting parents in their homes and facilitating weekly parents' forum meetings in school. A voluntary agency provides excellent practical advice and a library of resources for parents at these meetings. There is a

strong emphasis on ensuring personal safety with effective procedures for assessing any potential risks. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and students are robust. Very effective staff supervision and the encouragement of very positive relationships between all adults and learners ensure that pupils and students stay very safe. Pupils' and students' personal and social development needs are extremely well met through the curriculum. Several parents testify to the transformation in their child's confidence, learning and personal skills since attending the school, typically describing these as 'massive achievements'. Pupils and students receive good academic guidance for learning through detailed recording and tracking of their progress. Challenging targets are shared with pupils, students and parents, so that learners focus on what they need to achieve. Very strong links with the Connexions service and high quality transition arrangements ensure pupils and students are exceptionally well prepared for leaving school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior leaders, and all staff, are committed to providing the best education for pupils and students and are strongly focused on making the school even better. There has been considerable development and improvement since the last inspection. Governors are very well involved in this process. They rigorously hold the school to account and bring a host of skills to their work.

The professional development of staff is very good and, together with excellent links with other schools and organisations, has secured improved teaching and learning and the excellent personal development and well-being of pupils and students throughout the school.

Procedures for self-evaluation are thorough and the school understands its major strengths and weaknesses well. This has resulted in good improvements in reading, mathematics and, more recently, writing so that a large majority of learners now reach challenging targets in their work. The capacity to improve is, therefore, good and the school gives good value for money.

Managers have recently improved the system for collecting information on the progress made by pupils and students and has a large amount of data. This has enabled them to see where individual pupils or students need support or which subjects need to be improved. However, this information is not yet analysed by managers in a way which shows precisely where progress for different groups of learners could be improved, such as the more able in some classes. This slows, but does not prevent, the school from taking pupils' and students' achievements to the next level.

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
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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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

15 June 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Bracken Hill School, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 7HZ

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and seeing some of your lessons.

We found your school to be well run and very caring. It is a good school, with many excellent activities going on, just like you told us. It helps you to make good progress in your lessons, and outstanding progress in your social and personal skills. This prepares you very well for your future. Your headteacher and senior staff do a good job in seeing that the school keeps improving. We would now like them to check how well different groups of you are doing to see if further improvements could be made. We are very impressed with how hard you work and your excellent behaviour and we think that you make an outstanding contribution to the school and community. Your teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at helping you to meet quite challenging targets, although we would like them to make sure that all of you are able to progress as fast as you can in every lesson. This is because in one or two lessons a few of you are not challenged to do your very best.

We were pleased to see that you take some exercise and that most of you choose to eat a healthy diet, although we think that a few of you still bring too many crisps and fizzy drinks to school. Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of subjects and activities to keep you interested and help you learn. The school supports and guides you very well to keep safe and become well-rounded people.

The way you care for one another is impressive and you clearly enjoy coming to school. We think that this, alongside your good skills in working together, will help you cope very well in your future work or college.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Potheary

Lead Inspector