

Brentwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106391
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	309112
Inspection dates	17–18 October 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	78
6th form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs L Carlisle
Headteacher	Mrs H Moon
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Brentwood Avenue Timperley Altrincham Cheshire WA14 1SR
Telephone number	0161 928 8109
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This average-sized special school caters for students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties with autistic spectrum disorders. Currently, 20 students have profound and multiple learning difficulties and 12 have autistic spectrum disorders. The remaining students have severe learning difficulties. All students have statements of special educational need. The nature of their difficulties means that students are working at below national expectations and a minority exhibit challenging behaviour. A very small number of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The headteacher took up her post in February 2007. There has been significant staffing disruption during the past year or so, owing to illness, resignations and appointments. In particular, all the teachers in the three classes for students with autistic spectrum disorders were new to the school in September 2007. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Gold Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brentwood is a good school with outstanding features. Students are adamant that they enjoy school. They say that one reason for their enthusiasm is that they 'do lots of nice things'. In other words, the good quality curriculum provides a huge variety of contexts for learning. For example, there are very popular lunchtime and after-school clubs, with something to suit most tastes. Again, students are frequently out and about in the community, applying skills learned in the classroom, trying new experiences, and interacting with unfamiliar people. These opportunities to socialise make up one of the elements leading to students' outstanding personal development. The school's success in promoting healthy lifestyles is recognised by the Healthy Schools Gold Award. Students appreciate the importance of a good diet and plenty of exercise. They respond eagerly to all manner of sporting activities, which often involve competitions or chances to learn from specialist coaches. Students are also keen to be good citizens and are willing and able to take on responsibilities. The school council is very active and is proud of achievements such as instigating a weekly roast dinner on the lunch menu. Students are quite clear that this is a school where people help each other. They take their cue from the outstanding care, guidance and support staff provide. For example, education staff, therapists and the school nurse work closely together to identify the best ways to meet the health, welfare and personal care needs of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Consequently, barriers to learning are lessened and students are as comfortable and relaxed as possible. The school strikes a careful balance between making special arrangements for individuals or groups of students, such as those with autistic spectrum disorders, and including them in activities with others of the same age and in whole-school events.

Students make good progress and achieve well because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers collect a great deal of useful information about students' learning and development. They use this well to ensure that lessons motivate students and to match activities to the range of learning difficulties within the class. The accredited courses offered, however, do not all have the potential to fully recognise the achievements of these highest attaining students.

Leadership and management are good. With strong support from the acting deputy headteacher and senior team, the headteacher ensures that the school continues to flourish and move forward. Self-evaluation is good and provides an accurate picture of the school's strengths and where more improvement is needed. The progress of individual students is tracked carefully and action is taken if any are not doing as well as anticipated. Information from teachers' assessments of students' learning is not analysed well enough in order to identify variations in the performance of different groups of students or the success of different subjects. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection and Brentwood demonstrates a good capacity to continue to develop.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Progress and achievement are good in the sixth form. Students all gain external accreditation in Accreditation for Life and Living courses, such as home management and personal skills. Higher attaining students are successful in National Skills Profile work in number. The quality of teaching and learning is good and students' status as young adults is fully recognised. The good quality curriculum is developing rapidly to provide even more experiences in the community.

There are increasing opportunities for students to pursue taster courses at college and work experience is becoming more closely matched to students' aspirations. The quality of care, guidance and support and students' personal development are just as outstanding as in the main school. Students leave the sixth form as confident and well-rounded young adults, well prepared for the next stage in their education. The sixth form is led and managed well. Plans to further improve the provision demonstrate a clear determination to enable each student to achieve his or her potential.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make full use of teachers' assessments of students' learning in order to compare the progress of different groups of students and identify where improvements are needed.
- Ensure that teaching and the curriculum always meet the needs of higher attaining students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Individual and whole-school targets are challenging and students frequently meet them. Progress is often best in learning to communicate, number, and personal, social and health education. The outcomes of students' work in art, drama and physical education are of high quality. Students find writing particularly difficult and they tend to achieve less well in this aspect of English. In Key Stage 3, students begin gaining accreditation for units of their work. These build up to as many as 19 certificates by the end of Year 11. All Key Stage 4 students are successful in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge. There is no indication that any groups of students achieve less well than others, although those with profound and multiple learning difficulties move forward in very small steps.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students say that they especially like their friends and the staff, dinners and snacks, and using computers. Their attendance is above average. Behaviour is often exemplary but is good overall because a minority of students need significant support in order to control their actions. Students are clear that there is no bullying in school. One way in which they contribute to the school community is by 'being kind to friends'. Students frequently raise funds to help others. For example, bags made during an enterprise activity were sold for Comic Relief. Students begin to take some responsibility for their own safety. They learn to be safe pedestrians and some in the sixth form have started to become more independent users of public transport. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students develop an appreciation for varied performing arts through attending concerts and plays and taking part in performances from Shakespeare to 'Bugsy'. Students learn skills such as preparing meals and handling money which have a direct bearing on equipping them well for their future lives. Their positive attitudes enable students to make the most of new experiences. Talking about going caving, one sixth former commented, 'It was dark but I was brave'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Lessons frequently include interesting and relevant activities. For example, during an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, sixth form students with severe learning difficulties were motivated by tasks linked to football. Others, with profound and multiple learning difficulties, had alternative ICT activities equally well suited to their age and interests. Teachers promote independence at every turn, giving students time and space to solve problems for themselves. Behaviour is managed very well. In the classes for those with autistic spectrum disorders, visual timetables are often used very effectively to reassure students and prepare them for changes. This practice is not yet consistent. Teaching assistants make very strong contributions to learning. Lessons mostly meet the needs of all students but they do not always provide enough additional challenge for those working at higher levels.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It has some outstanding features notably the enormous range of activities that enrich students' experiences and promote learning and personal development. Visits vary from weekly shopping expeditions to ventures further afield, for example, to a beach to see sculptures. Sixth form students face up to personal challenges during a residential visit. Links with other schools enhance the curriculum for particular groups of students. For instance, some in Key Stage 4 have art lessons alongside mainstream students. Special days and weeks enable students to focus on particular topics and consolidate their learning. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of students with different learning difficulties. Entry level courses have recently been introduced in art and physical education as the school recognises the need to endorse the achievements of students working within National Curriculum levels. More such courses are needed. Exciting plans to improve playground facilities are about to be implemented but the outdoor space is cramped and there is no playing field.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents are confident that their children are cared for well. The arrangements to safeguard students are extremely thorough. For example, staff carefully assess the risks of harm to each child before they go on school visits and steps are agreed to ensure that all are as safe as possible. The school nurse provides excellent support for students' health needs. When necessary, students have very detailed and effective individual behaviour plans which include strategies for preventing incidents and improving behaviour. Staff receive extensive training in supporting all aspects of students' physical and personal needs. Links with other agencies and professionals are wide ranging and highly effective. Staff are developing ways to help students understand their own targets and they often attend their own annual review meetings. Induction

arrangements and those for preparing students for leaving school are comprehensive and greatly appreciated by parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

During a period of staffing turbulence, strong leadership and management have ensured that students' learning and personal development have not been interrupted. Action plans for moving the school forward are detailed, involve all staff with management responsibilities, and are effective. For example, sixth form links with further education colleges have been expanded. The analysis of progress towards targets is beginning to be used as a tool for school improvement. For instance, staff training was provided in response to students' relatively slower progress in writing, but insufficient time has elapsed to judge its effectiveness. Data from assessments of students' learning are now stored electronically. Again, there has not been time for senior staff and subject leaders to analyse these rigorously in order to make sure that all subjects and groups of students are equally successful. Governors are very supportive, are actively involved in observing the work of the school, and have informed opinions of strengths and weaknesses. The governing body has not yet contributed significantly to formal school self-evaluation. The school is ambitious for its students and intends to work towards achieving specialist school status in the area of cognition and learning.

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

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?	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
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 kind when I visited your school. The school council was a big help and so were the students who made sure I found my way around the school.

You told me that you like your school and that you do lots of nice things. I was amazed to hear about all the visits you go on. The school helps you to grow into young men and women who are ready to go on to college. I know how much you like the adults who teach and help you. They look after you extremely well.

You all learn a lot and get certificates for your work. I think that some of you could do work that is a bit harder and get some different certificates to show how well you have done. Your teachers keep a close eye on how much you each learn. I have asked your headteacher to make sure that all students are getting on just as well in every subject.

You are lucky to go to a good school like Brentwood. I want to send each of you my best wishes for the future.