

Briarwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109410
Local Authority	Bristol, City of
Inspection number	309972
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Pirt

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	85
6th form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Rowe
Headteacher	David Hussey
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2004
School address	Briar Way Fishponds Bristol BS16 4EA
Telephone number	01173 532651
Fax number	01173 532658

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Briarwood School provides for pupils and students with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and those with profound and multiple disabilities (PMLD). An increasing number of the school's population have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or complex medical issues in addition to their learning needs. Almost half of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and about one third are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The school, which is on two sites, operates extended provision during school holidays. Pupils and staff will relocate in 2010 to a newly built school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Briarwood is an outstanding school because pupils and students make outstanding progress both academically and in their personal development. These achievements are supported by outstanding teaching and a curriculum which, because of the extremely rigorous quality of assessment of pupils' progress, is very well tailored to the differing needs of all the learners. The pupils love coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing that they enjoy their lessons and that the school wants them to do as well as they can. One parent's comment was typical: 'I can't say how pleased we are with Briarwood – it is a great place.'

The pupils feel safe and well supported in the friendly and very caring ethos of the school. They learn to remain healthy, choosing to eat healthy food, to keep safe and to behave very well. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff, their good attendance and the obvious pride they have in the school and their own achievements. One parent said, 'When the bus arrives to collect him, his face beams with joy and excitement' and this was reinforced by a pupil who said 'This school is great – I never, ever, want to go to another one!'

Pupils in the Foundation Stage make a very good start to their education as they recognise and develop routines and post-16 students achieve extremely well in applying their knowledge and skills to practical situations.

Learning activities in the school are characterised by the high quality of support given to pupils by teachers who are well qualified to meet the learning needs of pupils, the well-trained teaching assistants and by the very high expectations that all adults have for the pupils' success. Pupils with autism and those with profound and multiple learning needs are given learning activities which challenge them to perform to the best of their abilities. No group in the school achieves less well than any other. The school's procedures for assessing pupils' overall achievement are outstanding and this enables teachers to keep a close eye on pupils, planning work to ensure they achieve as highly as they can. A consistent method of tracking this progress more easily is being developed. At present, although effective, it is not easily accessible to all staff and is very time-consuming.

The extremely wide range of opportunities to enrich the curriculum are outstanding. For instance, pupils have the opportunity to join musical celebrations and perform in concerts alongside their mainstream peers as well as attending mainstream schools and having mainstream pupils join them. They have excellent links with the community and, in post-16, these links are a strength of the school. These and the wide range of other inclusion opportunities add to the pupils' enjoyment of school and have a significant impact on their self-confidence and social development. The headteacher's clear vision and commitment to the pupils and staff have enabled him to give outstanding leadership to the school and led to the formation of a very talented, hardworking senior management and a staff team who are equally committed. The governing body monitors the school's work very effectively and challenges leaders continually to improve provision for the learners. Briarwood School is very highly regarded locally because of its valuable work in supporting and working with mainstream staff and pupils in a range of schools and nurseries. The school evaluates its own work very well. It has consistently improved provision since the previous inspection, when it was judged a good school. There is an

outstanding capacity to continue this improvement as the school moves into a new phase in its development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress, especially in their basic literacy and numeracy, and life skills training, and in their work-related learning. They make excellent progress also in their personal development because of outstanding procedures to help them gain experiences of adult life. For instance, all the students, including those with PMLD, benefit from the excellent community links through business enterprise, creative areas and sport, including work with Bristol Rugby Club. Work experience is carefully adapted to their abilities. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. Excellent teaching results in all the students achieving their potential through a range of accredited qualifications. The school has developed very good links with local colleges, which all students attend at some time. The leadership and management of the provision are of a very high quality. As one comment from a parent stated, 'post-16 provision is outstanding, providing opportunities well beyond those we expected.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make outstanding progress in their communication, physical and personal development from a very low starting point on entry. The opportunities to work with mainstream pupils are of the highest quality and contribute to the very good progress in their personal skills and behaviour. This provides a very good basis for their learning as they move up through the school. There are rigorous procedures to assess and monitor the children's work and their activities are very well matched to appropriate small steps in learning. The staff know the children very well and demonstrate this by the high standards of planning and teaching, tailored to the needs of each individual. Children receive a high level of individual attention and relationships are excellent. There are very effective partnerships with parents that start with a thorough induction process. The children are very well cared for and consistently encouraged to understand the importance of keeping safe and healthy. They respond by behaving very well. The department is very well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the tracking process to make it more accessible to all staff and less time-consuming to use.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

All the pupils in the school achieve very well and make outstanding progress. This applies to pupils in the Foundation Stage and to post-16 students who are enabled to gain a range of appropriate qualifications. Although the pupils' levels of attainment remain well below average, they continue to progress as fast and as far as they can and so realise their potential. For instance, the pupils with PMLD and those with autistic conditions, although achieving success by tiny steps, make progress at a rate which is outstanding, as shown through the assessment records and analysis of individual education plan (IEP) targets. A high level of focus on signing,

symbols and electronic aids helps considerably with their communication. Pupils at early stages of learning English make very good progress in developing early speaking and listening skills. The school's highly effective analysis of each pupil's progress helps ensure that there is no underachievement by any individual or group. Pupils make excellent progress in meeting challenging targets in their IEPs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils' make outstanding progress in their personal development as they respond very well to spiritual issues and display positive attitudes. The very good relationships they have with each other and staff indicate their outstanding social development as they readily engage with each other in a multiracial setting. They respond exceptionally well to the many artistic, musical and other cultural opportunities in and out of school. The pupils have an excellent understanding of the value of exercise and healthy eating because of the extensive personal, health and social education (PHSE) programmes and very good opportunities to take part in physical exercise despite the limited facilities. Their overall behaviour is excellent and any incidents related to their learning needs quickly subside through very effective management processes. Attendance is good despite being affected by a small number of pupils with significant medical conditions. The pupils feel safe and confident and know what is expected from them. They learn how to keep themselves safe and report that there is no bullying or intimidation. They said, 'Everyone likes each other' and that they like coming to school. Post-16 students increase their economic awareness through their very good progress in work-related learning and the many community activities. They are exceptionally well prepared for the transition into adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The consistently high quality of teaching has been achieved through rigorous and effective monitoring by senior staff and subject leaders. The well-qualified teachers know their pupils very well and this enables them to plan challenging, well-paced and interesting activities for each pupil, so ensuring that they make outstanding progress. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils' achievements and these are shared by the support staff. They scrupulously assess and record each small step in pupils' progress and this has a very positive impact on achievement. This progress is identified in planning by setting challenging targets based on rigorous assessment. There are very good relationships between staff and those pupils who receive high levels of individual support, giving them the confidence to try new things themselves. The pupils therefore enjoy their lessons and try their best. Teachers manage the pupils' behaviour extremely well and staff deal with any challenging behaviour calmly and with understanding and support for the pupil involved. Pupils understand and respond well to clear routines. This helps teachers to maintain a clear focus on learning. There are very good relationships with parents that help support pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it is extensively adapted to meet individual pupils' needs and incorporates personal development opportunities throughout. The curriculum is massively enriched by the work pupils undertake in mainstream schools and with pupils visiting from them. There is a wealth of links with other schools, courses, business, sports, arts and leisure providers. The specialist teachers provide a curriculum that is responsive to the pupils' various needs and support staff ensure that all pupils can take advantage of the full range of activities. The very effective monitoring by subject leaders ensures that the curriculum is continually developing as learners' needs change. The Foundation Stage curriculum is soundly based on early learning strategies and very well adapted to each child's learning needs.

There is excellent provision throughout the school to develop the pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, which increases their access to learning in other subjects. There are very good programmes to help pupils understand how to keep safe and healthy and to prepare them for the next stage in their lives. This is illustrated in the outstanding post-16 curriculum. Pupils of all abilities make exceptional progress through the outstanding provision for personal development and this has a positive impact on their confidence and self-esteem. Excellent use is made of the limited accommodation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' care, welfare and support are a central priority and are outstanding. The staff make every effort to ensure that pupils' medical, personal, therapeutic and learning needs are met, ensuring that pupils are in the best possible position to learn and develop their personal skills. There is excellent support from outside professionals and agencies. The school supports good attendance very effectively. Pupils benefit from the excellent support given to parents when children are ill or where there are family difficulties, with one parent stating 'They care about all things happening to your child.' The outstanding level of assessment and recording of the pupils' achievement means that parents receive a high standard of information at the annual review and other meetings. This leads to very effective guidance, with pupils being as aware of their targets as their learning needs allow. However, the tracking of pupils' progress, although effective, is too time-consuming for staff. Older students receive very good support and guidance as they are about to take the next steps in their life. The well-established links with local colleges, the accreditation they earn and the experiences they gain prepare them well for their life after school. The many parents who returned questionnaires expressed, with no exceptions, their gratitude for the high standards of care and teaching which their children receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The very clear vision and direction of the headteacher is an essential element in the school's success and has led to the creation of a very talented leadership team with a strong sense of purpose. They are supported by staff who benefit from outstanding training opportunities and who are committed to the best outcomes for pupils. The inclusion programme is exemplary, a strength of the school, and is recognised as such by outside agencies. School leaders have a very good overview of pupils' achievements through the excellent assessment and tracking procedures, ensuring that all pupils have equal access to learning opportunities and that targets are relevant and challenging. The rigorous and effective way managers evaluate improves every aspect of the school's performance, identifying the required developments through the very effective self-evaluation procedures. Subject leaders monitor each aspect of the curriculum effectively and play a significant role in maintaining high standards of teaching and learning.

Communication within the school is excellent. The staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued. There are excellent procedures to support new staff. Governors work closely with senior staff and have a very clear view of the strengths of the school and the developments needed. The extended provision of play schemes during the summer and Easter vacations are extremely well managed, leading to a very successful project that is very well attended and valued by pupils and parents alike.

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Annex A

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?	1	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

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 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	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

23 July 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Briarwood School, Bristol BS16 4AE

Not long ago, Mr Jones and I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting you all in the classrooms, in meetings and around the school. Thank you again, as you were all very kind to us.

We were with you for two days and in that time, we could see that you go to an outstanding school. We could see, and you told us, that you all enjoy school very much. Here are some of the things we liked about your school.

- You work hard and make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development.
- There are many different people at the school who look after you very well to help keep you healthy and safe.
- There is an excellent range of activities, including those that help you become independent, make choices, learn how to behave well and prepare for life after school.
- You receive excellent teaching and your teachers and other staff are very good at recording all the progress you make. This helps them to prepare interesting work for each of you, although sometimes teachers have to spend too long checking to see whether you are doing well.
- Your headteacher and other senior staff run the school extremely well and everyone, including your parents, gives them good support.

We have asked the school to do something to make things even better. We would like the school to help teachers to develop quicker ways to check and record how well you are doing. We hope you all get on well in the future. Please thank your parents for all the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Yours sincerely

Graham Pirt Lead Inspector