

# Bidwell Brook School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113643
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	311321
<b>Inspection date</b>	9 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rowena Onions

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	91
6th form	17
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Julia Williams
<b>Headteacher</b>	Audrey Finch
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 December 2004
<b>School address</b>	Shinner's Bridge Dartington Totnes TQ9 6JU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01803 864120
<b>Fax number</b>	01803 868025

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school provides for pupils and young people with severe, complex and profound learning difficulties. All pupils enter the school with a statement of special educational needs. Pupils have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Over recent years, the school population has included an increasing proportion of pupils with more complex difficulties, including an increasing number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. In 2005, the school's age range changed to include pupils between the ages of 16 and 19. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Bidwell Brook is a good school. It has a number of important outstanding features, including the provision for students in the post-16 department and the pupils' personal development. Because they are well taught, pupils make good progress overall and many reach or exceed the targets set for them.

Pupils show enthusiasm and liking for school. They demonstrate remarkable care and concern for each other, and work and play together very harmoniously. Pupils, including those in the Foundation Stage, make strong progress in personal, social and health education. This, together with strong pastoral care, assists them to be happy in school, to learn key life skills and to learn to work in ever-broadening circumstances. Within their capabilities, they very successfully learn how to keep themselves healthy, safe and well and many make conscious decisions that help them to do this. Adults manage pupils very well in class, ensuring that lessons are conducted in a safe and harmonious atmosphere that helps pupils to learn. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together, enabling pupils to work in smaller groups and so to receive a more personalised programme of work. Good knowledge of the individuals allows teachers to plan different levels of activity to suit differing needs. Teachers are gaining skills in using, and helping pupils to use, different types of communication, including signing. This is, however, an aspect of teaching that requires further development.

Pupils are provided with a wide curriculum that encompasses their work in school and, where appropriate, well planned opportunities to work in other schools, colleges and workplaces. The school makes very good use of local facilities and of visitors, for example visiting artists and sportspeople. This breadth of opportunity not only extends pupils' experiences but also successfully promotes growing self-confidence. There is outstanding provision in the arts that allows pupils to develop creativity and a sense of self-belief. The post-16 curriculum is very strong, allowing the students to engage in a wide range of work-related learning opportunities that prepare them particularly well for life beyond school. As a result, pupils move forward with a mixture of confident enthusiasm and sadness at having to leave Bidwell Brook.

The successful leadership of the headteacher has promoted a strong sense of 'team' in the school. Pupils play a full part in helping the school run smoothly and develop further. School leaders and governors work with other staff to identify strengths and areas for improvement in provision and to address the latter. School self-evaluation is honest and actions to improve are well planned. The school is developing systems for helping it to evaluate its overall effectiveness, in particular to evaluate the progress made by different groups of pupils. The use of these systems, however, is not yet sufficiently refined to provide this information. Despite this, the strong drive to improve the way staff work together and the success of past improvements means that the school has good capacity to improve further.

The sense of community extends beyond the school. Parents comment very positively on the way they, as well as their children, are supported by the school. The support work that the school provides in local mainstream schools is highly valued. Overall, parents are very positive about the school but a few hold concerns about the level of provision of physiotherapy and occupational and speech therapies. Despite the best efforts of the staff and governors, provision is slim and some pupils are not receiving as much as they need to help them best maintain and develop good health and communication.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The post-16 department of the school is outstanding. Every student gains significantly from the combination of outstanding teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Relationships are very strong and this, together with very effective teaching of life skills, assists the students to make maximum progress. The students are very well aware of what they need to do to gain their accreditation and their movement towards this is very securely tracked and monitored. Through excellent provision in work-based learning, students mature and gain the skills to become more independent and to work with increasing confidence in different settings. By the time they leave the school, all have attained externally accredited awards and all are ready to move forward into the next phase of their lives. Staff ensure that all students leaving the school have a placement well matched to their needs and abilities, significantly helping to secure their futures. The outstanding quality of this relatively new provision is a testament to high quality leadership and management by the headteacher and the staff involved.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

There are only a very small number of children of Foundation Stage age in the school but good provision is made for them. The children are taught well and gradually settle into school, particularly enjoying and participating in routine activities such as their 'hello' song. The concentration on the development of personal, social and emotional development and on the development of communication skills pays off and ensures the children make good progress in relation to the targets set for them. A good curriculum meets their individual needs. The curriculum is, however, a little restricted by the lack of variety of experiences that they can gain from the current dedicated outdoor space.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Extend the teaching, learning and use of the range of ways in which pupils can communicate.
- Develop the tracking of pupils so that it gives more detailed information about progress, in particular, the progress of pupils with differing needs.
- Work with the local authority to extend provision for physiotherapy and occupational and speech therapies.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The nature of the pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities means that they are working at levels well below national expectations, but the progress they make is good in relation to the targets set for them, and significantly more than half the pupils have exceeded their targets in all subjects. Although the school does not have collective data about the progress made by different groups of pupils, the individual data indicate that all make at least satisfactory progress. The progress made by the pupils in the class dedicated to the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder is consistently good. Because of strong provision and the value the school places on it, pupils make particularly strong progress in personal, social and health education and this underpins the good progress they make in other subjects, including English and

mathematics. The artwork seen on inspection was of high quality and showed a clear development of skills and self-expression over time.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The exceptional relationships between pupils and adults in the school make pupils feel safe and secure. Both they and their parents report how happy they are to attend and rates of attendance are very high in comparison to similar schools. This strong relationships mean that pupils feel confident to communicate to adults their successes and concerns. Behaviour is very good overall. Instances of unsafe behaviour are a consequence of individual pupils' complex social and communication difficulties rather than deliberate antisocial attitudes. Very effective behaviour management strategies are consistently and sensitively used to help these pupils improve. Pupils are as well prepared as possible for their future economic well-being through the emphasis placed upon making appropriate choices and taking personal responsibility. This enables all to work well together and some to work in sheltered settings. They make significant contributions to the day-to-day organisation of the school through taking responsibility, for example for tidying up after lessons. They are involved in school improvement, such as contributing through the school council to the proposed improvement of the school grounds. They make valued contributions to the wider community, through shared activities such as taking part in drama productions with local schools.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Teaching and learning throughout the school have a variety of notable strengths, in particular, the way that lessons are run in a calm, effective manner assisting pupils to relax and learn. Teachers and teaching assistants make every effort to plan work that builds on the pupils' own experiences, making it relevant and motivating. A wide range of practical work assists the pupils to learn skills that directly relate to their everyday needs. Pupils are encouraged to work together and with adults but also to gain as much independence as possible. The changing and increasingly diverse nature of the school population is extending the need for staff to use and teach pupils to use a wider range of ways of communicating. Although developing, there is inconsistency in teachers' competence in this. In the classes where different types of communication are more established, all pupils, even those who can communicate verbally, gain from the consolidation of their understanding that a combination of communication strategies, for example signing alongside talking, gives them.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The school curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities to enthuse and motivate pupils and to meet their academic and personal needs. There are outstanding opportunities for enrichment, developing pupils socially, emotionally and physically and incorporating a high degree of

challenge, as well as encouraging independence. There is excellent cooperation with partner schools and colleges, which benefits both Bidwell Brook pupils and pupils and students in the partner institutions. The breadth of opportunities is greatly enhanced, for example in the arts and in sport, by the opportunities for pupils to use facilities and expertise provided through these links. Pupils benefit from the outstanding provision in the arts, in developing cultural awareness as well as gaining great satisfaction from the products of their efforts. Provision in personal, social and health education is equally strong and effective.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

There is high quality pastoral care given to the pupils. Every effort is made to ensure their personal safety and well-being. The relatively recent appointment of a school nurse, for example, was a result of considerable campaigning by the school governors. Parents and pupils agree that pupils are safe, well looked after and have someone they know and trust to turn to. Parental confidence was summed up by the parent who wrote, 'My child could not be in better hands'. School staff do their best to provide pupils with the appropriate physiotherapy and speech therapy work but this is made difficult by the lack of specialist support. The governors are taking action to try to address this issue but the difficulty remains unresolved. The school has developed tracking systems to show that individual pupils are making progress and is using this to set appropriate targets for them. Pupils, within their capabilities, are aware of these targets and are appropriately included in their setting and review. However, the systems need to identify more closely the progress of different groups of pupils so that the school can be absolutely sure that all are making optimum progress.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The headteacher and senior staff are effective leaders. The headteacher has supported and strengthened the role undertaken by senior staff. The school's self-evaluation processes, including robust ongoing checking of teaching and learning, are accurate. Consequently, the school knows its own strengths and weaknesses and takes effective action to improve. Progress data is used as part of this self-evaluation but the current lack of refinement restricts its use by subject leaders in subject evaluation and by governors in holding the school to account. Overall governance is good. The governors are highly supportive of the school and are very proactive in trying to improve provision, for example, taking action to enable the appointment of the school nurse. Finances are very well managed, ensuring that the school is able to support, through staffing, the wide range of inclusion activities both in and out of the school. Partnerships with others are a major strength, having a very significant impact on the lives of the pupils at Bidwell Brook and on many others in the local community.

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

### Achievement and standards

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	1
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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
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	1	
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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Bidwell Brook School, Totnes, TQ9 6JU.

We would like to thank you all for looking after us so well when we came to visit your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. We are sure you will be pleased that we think yours is a good school and that some things about it are outstanding.

This is what we liked about your school.

- You all get on exceptionally well with each other and help each other to do your very best.
- Post-16 students do outstandingly well, especially in gaining skills that will help them in their future lives.
- You make good progress in all subjects and very good progress in your personal, social and health education.
- You have opportunities to work with people from other schools and colleges.
- Adults take exceptionally good care to make sure you keep safe and well.
- The quality and range of work you do in the arts.

We also think that your headteacher and governors are doing a good job working with the staff as a very good team to improve your school.

To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do.

- Teach you to communicate in lots of different ways, for example by using more signing.
- Use their assessment of your progress to check that you are all doing as well as you can.
- Work with the local authority to make sure that those of you who need physiotherapy and speech therapy can have this help.

You can help your teachers by continuing to try your hardest.

I wish you all every success in the future and hope you continue to enjoy your school.

Rowena Onions Lead Inspector