

The Bromfords School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115323
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311913
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1138
6th form	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Whitham
Headteacher	Mr Richard Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Grange Avenue Wickford Essex SS12 0LZ
Telephone number	01268471201
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Bromfords School is located in Wickford, where just over half of its students live. A significant minority of students live in nearby Basildon. The sixth form is smaller than average. Standards on entry to Year 7 are close to average, but with slightly fewer working above the expected level for their age. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Adult experience of higher education in students' families is lower than average. The great majority of students are of White British backgrounds. Around 7% of students are drawn from a wide variety of minority ethnic groups, including a small number of students from the Traveller communities. There are small numbers of looked after children and no students at an early stage of learning English. Boys outnumber girls by a small margin. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is below average, but rising in lower year groups. Of the 8% receiving higher levels of support, half have moderate learning difficulties and a quarter have emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are smaller numbers with physical or sensory impairment, dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorders or language difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Bromfords School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The school is highly rated in GCSE performance tables and has many strengths, including many hard working and committed staff. These factors persuaded senior staff to rate its effectiveness as good. However, the school also has areas of weaker provision that were not given enough weight in its self-evaluation. Some of these relate to staffing difficulties that are being addressed. The weaknesses do not affect the sixth form, which is judged effective.

Students follow healthy lifestyles. Many contribute positively to the school and wider community and most feel safe at school but some students say that bullying is not stopped quickly enough. Most students are well-behaved, work hard and enjoy school, but a minority lose focus too easily, slowing their own and others' progress. Misbehaviour is dealt with firmly. Exclusions have dropped from 300 last year to under 200 so far this year, but are still high. The school promotes a strong anti-bullying message, but does always not act firmly enough in practice.

The school has been highly ranked in performance tables in recent years because nearly all students have achieved a vocational qualification in information and communications technology (ICT) equivalent to four GCSEs at grade C. Special programmes to raise achievement for borderline students have enabled up to 81% to gain five or more A* to C grade passes. However, the figure for 5 passes including English and mathematics is average, reflecting underachievement in core subjects. Standards in Year 11 are below average in mathematics and English, a decline since last year in areas that are important for students' future education and working lives. Achievement is satisfactory overall because progress has improved in Key Stage 3 and standards in the current Year 9 have risen to meet national expectations. The majority of lessons are taught well and some are outstanding. Teaching is particularly effective when teachers assess the progress of students during the lesson. This type of assessment enables teachers to give students immediate guidance on how to improve. It also allows them to adapt the lesson for students who find the work easier or harder than expected. However, this feature is underdeveloped in too many lessons, including some that are good in other respects. There are also pockets of inadequate teaching. Students with LDD make satisfactory progress. They have individual education plans, but the vague targets are unhelpful to students and teachers. In other respects, the school monitors and support students' academic progress well.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior staff and curriculum leaders monitor teaching and learning well. They make accurate judgements of lesson quality, identifying strengths and weaknesses well, including the need to improve assessment. However, they have not acted firmly enough to eliminate known weaknesses such as underachievement in GCSE English and the high exclusion rate. This is partly because leadership roles have undergone significant changes over recent years, and some are still in transition. Governors give good support and satisfactory challenge to school leaders. The school's disability and race equality schemes do not meet statutory requirements.

The curriculum meets students' needs well and reflects the technology college status. Senior staff are constantly seeking improvements, a recent example being the cross-curricular 'Innovations' and 'Focus' programmes for Years 7 and 8, which are helping students to develop self-reliance and the ability to work together. Further development of the curriculum for older students plays a central role in the school's vision for the future. The school works well in

partnership with other schools and its extended schools programme provides a good range of sport, family learning activities, parents' workshops and health advice.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Leaders and managers show a good awareness of strengths and areas for improvement. Students' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy being in the sixth form, and develop good working relationships with staff, who they describe as approachable and always prepared to help. Students contribute well to the school and wider community, helping to organize drama productions and open evenings, undertaking voluntary work and raising money for charity. They feel well supported and know their targets. They are well prepared for future study and employment by good care, guidance and support and good links with outside agencies such as social services and Connexions. They engage enthusiastically in sporting and cultural activities. The satisfactory and improving curriculum includes several General Certificate of Education courses and a few intermediate level vocational courses. However, new pathways are being developed. Achievement is good because teachers have good subject knowledge and prepare students well for examinations by giving them a good grounding in study skills. Students progress from below average attainment on entry to close to average when they leave.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that evaluation is rigorous in all areas of the school's work and that firm action is taken to address known weaknesses such as underachievement in core subjects and the high exclusion rate.
- Improve the coordination of learning support to ensure that students with LDD meet individual progress targets that are based on accurate assessments of their needs.
- Ensure that all teachers assess the progress of students during lessons, so they can adapt lessons to meet students' needs and guide them on how to improve.
- Meet statutory requirements in relation to race and disability equality schemes

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. Standards on entry to Year 7 are close to average, but with slightly fewer working above the expected level for their age. The school has followed a strategy for several years that has delivered impressively high numbers with five or more GCSE passes at grade A* to C and a high ranking for progress in school performance tables. The strategy is based on a very successful ICT course, which provided around 40 per cent of all A* to C grade passes in 2007 in only 12 per cent of curriculum time. Achievement is also good in the Year 7 and 8 'Innovations' curriculum, because students develop good work habits. Nevertheless, there are significant areas of weaker performance. For current Year 11 students, standards are well below average in mathematics and English. For the three years up to 2007, students underachieved in GCSE English and in Key Stage 3 mathematics.

Progress in Key Stage 3 has also been slower than expected in English and science. Results for 2007 show that higher attaining students made less progress than expected, as reflected in the small number of A* grades at GCSE and higher levels in tests at age 14. Boys made better progress than girls in both key stages. Older students who were receiving higher levels of learning support did not make as much progress towards qualifications as their peers. Classroom support helps students with LDD to make satisfactory progress, but the weaknesses in core subjects slow them down. However, the school's own assessments suggest that current Year 9 students are making good progress and their standards are average or better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are satisfactory. Their moral, social and cultural awareness is good, but spiritual development is less secure – particularly for students in the older years. Generally, students engage well with visitors and their peers. A good number of students take part in sports and other activities reflecting their commitment to fitness. Students make a positive contribution to both the school and wider communities via their charity fund raising and events such as the 'High Flyers' gymnastics and dance display, which also involved local primary schools. The personal development of students in Years 7 and 8 is enhanced by the 'Innovations' and 'Focus' programmes. These responsive and flexible programmes allow students to develop the decision-making and problem-solving skills that will stand them well in their later life. Students enjoy the variety of work undertaken, whether that be making a rocket one week or taking part in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the next. Students are satisfactorily prepared for their future economic well-being. They gain some good work related learning skills and satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills.

Attendance is steadily improving and is now average. Students generally feel safe in the school. They observe safe practices and are mostly orderly and considerate of one another. However, students do not always feel confident enough to report bullying, an issue that also concerns some parents. Behaviour is satisfactory. Most students behave well, but a minority of students engage in low-level disruption in lessons that do not capture their interest, and this reduces students' enjoyment to satisfactory overall. Over the last two years, an average of one student per day has received a fixed term exclusion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The majority of lessons are good and some are outstanding, but a small minority are inadequate. Nearly all teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and the associated examination requirements. Many of them prepare and teach lessons that include a good range of activities that are well matched to students' needs and interests. This is particularly true of teaching in the Year 7 'Innovations' programme, which fully engages the students and develops their literacy, numeracy, independent learning and team-working skills. In contrast, the quality of independent learning in the vocational ICT course is weak. In addition, some classes have had a succession of temporary teachers of varying

effectiveness. Some teachers, particularly in the sixth form, make very good use of peer assessment and self-assessment to enhance students' knowledge and understanding, and to prepare them well for examinations. In many lessons, there is a good working atmosphere, and teachers use questioning well to include all students. They develop students' ideas well, and they encourage them to discuss topics in a mature fashion, so that they can listen to and learn from one another as well as from teachers. The level of students' engagement in lessons is mostly good, but not consistently so. In some lessons, including ICT, students have too few opportunities to think for themselves because the activities are too teacher-directed. In a minority of cases, teachers do not adapt their teaching well enough to meet students' differing needs. When this happens, the pace of learning slows and a few students lose interest and disrupt the learning of others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has a good curriculum that reflects its readiness to develop new and more relevant learning programmes. All students take courses in ICT and design and technology, reflecting the school's specialist Technology College status. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of sports, drama, arts and languages activities and visits. Close links with employers and further education provide worthwhile work related learning, including work experience or shadowing. The school is playing an active part in the local 14-19 partnership developments, taking a lead in ICT and creative media.

The cross-curricular programmes in Years 7 and 8 provide a good balance of thematic and subject specific approaches to learning and help to smooth the transition from primary school. These programmes additionally help students' personal development by incorporating citizenship and personal, social and health education. The Year 9 'Flex' curriculum allows a significant number of students to start GCSE design and technology and science courses in Year 9. This provides them with opportunities to extend their studies in Year 11, for example, to reach the highest grades in core subjects. Students further benefit in Key Stage 4 from a wide range of options, including alternative programmes that incorporate work experience and college study. The school has recognised the need to review its 14-19 pathways in ICT in light of disappointing vocational GCE results last year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Many staff show a high level of commitment to supporting students, who in turn support and care for each other well. Staff vetting is both thorough and robust and meets current government requirements well. Staff know the child protection and health and safety procedures well. The school has a clear behaviour code and deals firmly with misbehaviour. A more positive approach to rewarding good behaviour is helping to reduce exclusions.

Students are aware of the academic targets that they are working towards. Their overall progress is monitored effectively by learning managers. The most effective teachers not only mark regularly but also assess students' understanding and knowledge during lessons. They are able to give worthwhile and specific guidance to students on how to improve. However, assessment

is not consistently good, for a variety of reasons. For example, some is based on homework that not all have attempted, some is too infrequent and some of the feedback does not refer to students' progress in meeting their individual targets.

Learners with difficulties or disabilities are identified promptly, but the coordination of support arrangements is ineffective. Senior leaders recognise the urgent need to address this aspect of the school's work. The targets in individual education plans are not the practical, helpful tool that they are meant to be. Consequently, students' individual and particular needs are not fully met, and students do not always receive the additional support that they require.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior leaders have identified the school's main strengths and many of its weaknesses and have devised very comprehensive improvement plans. The monitoring of teaching and learning is regular and accurate and identifies ways of improving performance. The senior leadership team gives good support to pastoral leaders and subject heads to help them develop their roles and improve standards. Staff are fully committed to improving the school and contribute in many ways. The school has taken effective action to tackle the most pressing aspects of inadequate performance, but some weaknesses remain in learning support and a minority of teaching.

Target setting is realistic and is based on regular analysis of students' attainment and progress, but is only adequately challenging; its impact in core subjects is to maintain students' standards at average levels rather than helping them to improve. The school's self evaluation has sometimes underestimated the importance of problems that have a confined impact. Examples include: underachievement in one or two subjects; staffing problems that repeatedly affect the same few classes; the behaviour of the small minority of students who have been excluded several times. The school has not analysed its results deeply enough to demonstrate equality of achievement for students with LDD, or among different ethnic groups.

The school provides satisfactory value for money because students' achievement and personal development are satisfactory. The day-to-day working of the school is efficient. The school has good financial systems. The administrative staff follow good practice in seeking best value and using resources effectively. Governors are very involved in the life of the school. They visit regularly and give satisfactory support but they do not always challenge the senior leadership team strongly enough.

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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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

16 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bromfords School, Wickford, SS12 0LZ

I am writing to tell you about your school's recent inspection. Before I do that, I would like to thank you, on behalf of the inspection team, for the role you played. You were keen to tell us what you liked about the school, and where you thought it could be better.

We judge the sixth form to be good, but judge the school to be satisfactory overall. Many people involved with the school will be disappointed, because they know it is good in many respects. During the inspection, we saw that the school had several strong points. We particularly liked the unusual features of the curriculum, such as the 'Innovations', 'Focus' and 'Flex' programmes. The school is one of the top ten in Essex for the percentage of students passing 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. Most lessons are good and some are outstanding. However, we were concerned by some of the school's weaker points, and so were many of you.

You told us that bullying is not always taken seriously enough, that some classes have had several different teachers this year, and that others were slowed down by a few students playing up. We have asked the school to make sure that:

- all teachers make time in lessons to check how well you are understanding the work, so they can do something different if necessary
- there is better guidance for those of you who need learning support and your teachers, so you all know the most important things for you to learn next
- the senior staff put more emphasis on strengthening mathematics and English and reducing exclusions.

We have also reminded the school that it needs to have disability and racial equality schemes that explain in detail what it is doing to make sure that people from different backgrounds feel equally accepted and have equal opportunities.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector