

# Barrs Court School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117051
<b>Local Authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	312474
<b>Inspection date</b>	2 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Judi Bedawi

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
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	67
6th form	27
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Karen Rooke
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Aird
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 May 2004
<b>School address</b>	Barrs Court Road Hereford HR1 1EQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01432 265035
<b>Fax number</b>	01432 353988

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school occupies a very small site and is full to capacity. It provides for a wide range of needs including pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and autism (ASD). There are increasing numbers of pupils with PMLD and additional complex needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. Specialist school status for special educational needs cognition and learning was achieved in September 2006, along with the ArtsMark Silver award for creativity. Last year, it gained the new Healthy School Award. There are far more boys than girls. Almost all pupils are White British, with only single numbers of ethnic group pupils.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Barrs Court is an outstanding school, including the sixth form. The following are typical of the views expressed by parents: 'The headteacher and staff at Barrs Court are excellent in every way'. 'There is a real sense of care and warmth.' 'A wonderful school, cannot praise the staff enough for their commitment to the children.' '...a dedicated and exceptional headteacher.'

The headteacher provides innovative and inspirational leadership in this very caring and totally inclusive school. He is most ably supported by a dedicated, skilled staff team and a first-rate governing body, all working closely to secure the best possible outcomes for every pupil and student. The school is highly effective in releasing pupils' hidden strengths and removing, as far as is possible, the limitations of their complex difficulties and disabilities. It is at the forefront of developing provision for pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties and additional needs. As part of its specialist school status, it has developed a curriculum broken down into tiny achievable steps. This allows pupils with the most profound difficulties and additional needs to make impressive progress from exceptionally low starting points. This leads to wonderful behaviour, positive, respectful attitudes and a joyful spirit. More work is needed to fine-tune data analysis and benchmarking to provide even more challenging personalised targets. However, all groups make outstanding progress from their starting points. Teachers and highly trained specialist teaching assistants make learning fun by using very effective strategies, such as sensory and therapeutic learning, that fully match pupils' needs. As a result, all pupils thrive. Teaching techniques are very effective in enabling pupils to acquire basic life and learning skills. Provision for, and promotion of, pupils' personal development is excellent as pupils increasingly make sensible choices, particularly about staying fit, healthy and being safe. Higher attainers, through detailed academic guidance, increasingly gain accreditation and work skills. The quality of care, support and guidance is exemplary, with high calibre nurture, impressive access to health professionals and vibrant partnerships with enrichment that helps alleviate the limitations of the small school site. Despite the school's impressive record of securing some improvements in the accommodation through fundraising, fundamental limitations remain. Although the school has a good capacity to improve, the small size of the present accommodation is nevertheless a limiting factor. Younger pupils now joining the school have increasingly complex needs and this will place increasing demands on the current accommodation in future years. Parents, pupils, students, staff and governors all say they want and deserve better facilities and more space.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 1

Although standards remain well below the national average, students make impressive gains in their personal development and learning skills. Extensive links with colleges, schools and workplaces compensate well for the accommodation restrictions that would otherwise limit opportunities, to experience independent living. The curriculum is carefully adapted to meet students' needs through a wide range of work-related learning and accreditation. The outstanding care, support and guidance on hand enables students to become mature and very confident young citizens, eagerly prepared for life beyond school. Leadership and management are robust, sharply focused on overcoming difficulties and developing provision to the highest level. Students value enormously the work done to enhance their lives.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the accommodation is improved so that there is enough space to provide fully for the increasingly complex profile of pupils' needs.
- Fine-tune the analysis of data in order to set even more challenging pupil targets.

## Achievement and standards

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Attainment on entry is very low and standards remain well below average throughout the school and into the sixth form. However, from their very low starting points, the vast majority of pupils make impressive gains in achievement and progress over time as they move through the school. There is no significant difference in the progress of any pupil group, including the very few minority ethnic pupils, although a few pupils with regressive conditions progress slightly less well. Detailed tracking and individual assessment and monitoring records show almost all pupils making significant progress in relation to their prior attainment and capabilities. Both the highest and lowest attainers make equally impressive gains because of very high quality teaching. Higher attainers benefit from the wide range of accreditation and high quality academic guidance. The new specialist curriculum, with its division into 'small steps', is very well matched to the needs of lower attainers. Any 'dips' in individual progress are quickly identified and addressed. This outstanding achievement and progress continues into the sixth form, with students confident of their abilities and successfully gaining qualifications and places in college, sheltered work placements and employment.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Pupils' happy, beaming smiles are testament to their huge enjoyment and love of learning. Behaviour and relationships are excellent. Pupils feel safe, with exceptional tolerance and support for each other. The feeling of being part of a community is very evident. Older students say, 'We do a lot in the playground to help the younger ones play', using equipment brought by the active school council. Pupils do their best, developing communication skills very well, especially in the new focus groups. They like reading, role-play about other faiths and learning to use money when out shopping. The highly supportive, open, trusting atmosphere, coupled with very clear routines, ensures pupils know what to expect so that they never feel anxious. This means they are highly motivated by new learning experiences and challenges, for example expressing delight at touching and smelling a pineapple when making fruit smoothies. Attendance is good, considering the impact that serious and sometimes life-limiting medical conditions can have. As pupils move up the school, they make immense gains in self-confidence so that sixth formers travel, often independently, to college and work placements with remarkable maturity. They know about crossing roads safely. Students are keen to have more spacious sixth form rooms. They are proud of their successful team enterprise 'Smart Designs' business, selling bags and t-shirts in Hereford's Butter Market. Pupils' adoption of healthy lifestyles is impressive. They know that 'exercise makes your heart pump'. A pupil summed up, simply saying, 'Broccoli is good for you and smoking isn't!'

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 1**

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

There is a wealth of impressive practice readily shared between staff throughout the school, so teaching is never less than good and is often outstanding. High quality teaching is creative and innovative in its use of therapeutic and sensory strategies. This has a huge impact on all pupils' and students' learning and enjoyment. They say 'We have a good laugh 'cos teachers make learning fun and it helps us learn things we didn't know'. Teaching assistants are a key feature of the high quality teaching and learning. They offer outstanding support, for example in the high calibre specialist leading of the new focus groups or in the precise one-to-one support offered in class, in both cases securing the best inclusive teaching practice. Subject knowledge, linked to strategies to manage and ensure progress for the full range of needs, is outstanding. A wide range of resources are well used to support learning, including information and communication technology (ICT). Video and digital cameras are effectively used to record progress, which in turn significantly enhances the quality of planning to meet individual needs.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 1**

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

The curriculum is broad and balanced throughout, fully meeting pupils' and students' needs exceptionally well. It offers many opportunities for enrichment and work with other providers. As a result, it provides a very wide range of high quality vocational and work-related opportunities as well as suitable opportunities for academic success. There is, appropriately, a wide range of accreditation, including the award scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) and entry level GCSE mathematics for the higher-attaining pupils. Planning to provide opportunities for pupils to use ICT has improved significantly since the last inspection, and is now good. The strong ongoing focus and development of the curriculum, closely linked to the specialist school aims, is most successfully breaking new territory in relation to provision for pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties who are now able to access many more activities. These developments, which are now being adopted by other schools around the country, are very effectively meeting the needs of the increasing proportion of pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties joining the school.

### Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 1**

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

All staff give the highest priority to placing pupils' and students' care, welfare and wellbeing very much at the heart of the school's work. This is why provision is exemplary. Staff are extremely skilled at 'reading' pupils', offering unobtrusive yet excellent support when really required to enable them to develop, for example, their skills in gaining independence and taking responsibility. Induction procedures are extremely effective and enhanced by the very close relationships with parents and carers and by strong partnerships with other schools and outside agencies. As a result, all pupils, including those with more complex needs, get the best kind of

support and help right from the start. Child protection and safeguarding procedures, including health and safety, are robust. The school's own efforts to improve accommodation have recently led to better personal care and laundry facilities, but require further expansion to meet the increasing number of pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties arriving in school. Pupils' emotional well-being is developed outstandingly well through holistic therapies. The wide range of very effective strategies include the use of dramatic role play in focus groups and, in contrast, the serenity of massage, yoga and physiotherapy sessions. Sixth form students and younger pupils receive thorough guidance about future targets, careers options and choices. Individual progress discussions are held so that older students and higher-attaining pupils generally know their personal challenges, sometimes aided by the positive support of peer advocacy.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The headteacher leads by impressive example to inspire those around him. His innovative approach makes a significant contribution to securing outstanding outcomes in both academic achievement and personal development for all pupils and students in his care. He is a champion for their cause and those of his staff and school. The high calibre leadership and management at all levels, including governance, is due in no small measure to the inspirational leadership of the headteacher. His imaginative approach to education is at the 'cutting edge' of best practice, inspiring his dedicated staff and supportive governors to greater heights so they fully support the new initiatives. The high quality of leadership and management throughout the school has enabled it to sustain outstanding outcomes for pupils and students at a time when pupils are being admitted with increasingly complex needs. Leadership of the sixth form is equally impressive, forging considerable improvements in the last year. Teamwork is an outstanding strength, with all staff empowered to be managers and leaders, including the specialist teaching assistants. This empowerment is driving up standards. A high quality school development plan identifies areas for action, including the further development of subject schemes of work to fine-tune the curriculum. The governing body is incisive and challenging, equally positive about their school and very well involved in forward planning. Challenging target-setting and high quality monitoring are accurately focused on improvement. As a result, self-evaluation is highly effective, with the school knowing itself extremely well. Highly effective professional development is very effective in helping to ensure that all pupils benefit to the fullest extent from the school's provision. Financial acumen and forward planning are particularly astute in trying to improve accommodation, for example through fundraising. Capacity for improvement is good, rather than outstanding, due to the limitations of the school's accommodation.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	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	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

<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>	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	2	
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**

3 October 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Barrs Court School, Hereford, HR1 1EQ

You made us very welcome when we visited your very friendly school recently. We enjoyed meeting you. Thank you for telling us so much about what you do at school.

We think that your school is outstanding and provides you with an excellent education. We think that Richard is a perfect headteacher and we know you have excellent relationships with everyone who helps and cares for you so your progress is outstanding – well done! We know that your teachers are really good at making learning fun so that you make such impressive progress. We also know you enjoy the excellent range of activities provided for you, including sport, reading and going out and about in the local community. We think that your behaviour, manners and personal development are excellent and we think sixth form students help you incredibly well. Your sixth form is outstanding and students also make excellent progress, looking forward to their future beyond school. You have told us that you think the accommodation could be much better than it is. We completely agree with you. Your school is very well run, with lots of people involved and making it better all the time. We think they could do even more to give you even higher challenges and we know you will do your best to meet them.

- We want Richard and the governors to think of even more ways to resolve and improve the accommodation so that it fully meets your increasingly changing needs.
- We have asked Richard and your teachers to set you even higher challenges.

We know that you will continue to find learning exciting at Barrs Court School.

Best Wishes

Judi Bedawi Lead Inspector



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Judi Bedawi  
Lead Inspector