

Bower Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119036
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313164
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Trevor Phipps
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Fant Lane Maidstone ME16 8NL
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Age group	4-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The main school occupies a large site. It provides for a wide range of special educational needs, following redesignation and transition to catering for pupils with behavioural difficulties from those with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) in September 2005. Pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) predominate. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and nearly all are White British, with very few from other ethnic groups. Boys far outnumber girls.

Major construction and renovation is underway, affecting accommodation use on a daily basis. Very recently, two off-site mainstream secondary and primary units for ASD pupils have opened. The school has gained awards for sports, and the bronze Eco Schools award. It has also achieved healthy schools award and the Investors in People award. At the time of the inspection there were no children of nursery or reception age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bower Grove is a good school with many outstanding features. Parents greatly value the difference that it is making to their children's learning and personal development. Much is down to the very good leadership of the headteacher and the strong effective team work of staff. This has enabled the school to rise to the challenge of the many initiatives it undertakes. The excellent provision for pupils in the recently established satellite classes is an example of the effectiveness of leadership and the school's commitment to helping all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, given the difficulties they have had to overcome and the nature of their often complex additional needs. This is a direct result of the excellent care, guidance and support that is provided by the school and the exceptional links with outside agencies. There is a wonderful, joyous, inclusive community spirit within the school that extends outward into the local community which the school serves so well.

The school has worked hard to establish clear criteria for judging the progress of pupils and has been successful in tracking the progress of its pupils to enable them to make good progress. As a result pupils' achievements are good. The school recognises the need to refine its systems further so that assessment procedures are even more robust. This would enable the targets set for pupils to be more precise and enable pupils to have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve. There has been a good focus on adapting recent national strategies in literacy and numeracy and the school has rightly identified the need to develop pupils' skills in reading and writing further. Teaching is consistently good and on occasions outstanding. The planning of lessons is a particular strength. Pupils' work is well supported by an excellent curriculum that provides a very good range of activities. As a result pupils have very positive attitudes and clearly enjoy being in school because, as one said, 'We learn lots of new things we didn't know!'

The school is very aware of its strengths and areas for development and benefits from an effective governing body who provide a good level of support and challenge. There is a recognition that many of the new initiatives need to be fully embedded so that their impact can be measured accurately. This though is a school that thrives on challenge and has considerable capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Although there were no children of Foundation Stage age present during the inspection, records show that children make good progress, and in some areas of their learning, progress is outstanding. A particular strength is the progress made in communication where more able children make excellent gains in their learning. The curriculum is well matched to the wide range of needs of the children and is well supported by an excellent range of resources and facilities. This, together with the good quality accommodation, contributes much to children's achievements. Leadership is good and the provision is managed effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' achievements further in reading and writing across the school.

- Refine the use of assessment to enable more precise targets to be set so that pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are well below average because of the nature of pupils' special needs. Pupils, though, regardless of their wide range of abilities, make good progress and achieve well. For some, particularly the higher attainers progress is outstanding. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain passes in a range of accreditation extending from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and entry level qualifications to Foundation Tier GCSEs, with increasing success in mathematics and science. The school has identified that there is a need for Year 11 pupils to extend their command of language and comprehension in order to gain higher levels of accreditation. The school acts quickly to address areas where pupils are not doing as well as they should. This is evident in the work that has started to improve reading and writing across the school. There is no significant difference in pupil progress at any site or for any group, including girls or the very few minority ethnic pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils clearly enjoy school, saying, 'We have made friends here and we really like our teachers!' Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and because they want to learn and do well their attendance is good. They listen carefully and concentrate well. Most are confident in speaking, they answer questions well and like solving problems using the interactive whiteboards. One boy struggled to get a right answer and his class burst into spontaneous applause when he did, delighted in his success. Pupils are very supportive of each other and when there are sometimes outbursts of inappropriate behaviour, they act with tolerance and maturity so class disruption is minimal. Outside lessons, behaviour is lively, but pupils say they feel very safe. Bullying is not an issue because they say it is dealt with so well, aided by the highly popular reward points. Pupils fully adopt healthy lifestyles and are enthusiastic about sport. They say they now eat better at home. School community pride is exceptional. The efforts of the school council to improve the environment are impressive. The 'eco' recycling and the allotment business enterprise provide older pupils with real insight into work, as does their ability to travel alone. Pupils talk enthusiastically about work experiences and college taster days, and are very well prepared for life after school

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Parents are delighted by the attention their children receive from staff. A typical comment was, 'The teachers at Bower Grove have a heart of gold.' The management of challenging behaviour by all staff is impressive, enabling a positive learning atmosphere. Teachers' subject knowledge and awareness of the special educational needs of the pupils is strong. They know that pupils greatly prefer practical activities and in many lessons this a key to the successful teaching within the school. However, occasionally this sometimes results in an insufficient focus on encouraging pupils to record their work. In the majority of lessons work is suitably challenging, progress improves significantly and pupils enjoy a strong sense of achievement. This was very

evident in an excellent English lesson for Year 7 pupils where pupils benefited from enthusiastic teaching and challenging objectives. The teamwork between learning support assistants and teachers is outstanding. Support staff carry out very effective work with pupils in one-to-one activities and with behaviour. However, they are not always utilised fully in whole-class situations, such as at the ends of lessons, in providing additional explanation if pupils have not fully understood teaching points. And the pupils? They think their teachers are the best!

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an exceptionally broad and exciting curriculum, successfully holding pupils' interest. It enhances personal development, often following periods of disaffection at other placements. Planning is most carefully structured to identify and meet not only the demands of different key stages but also the wide range of pupils' needs. There are many opportunities for enrichment and work with other providers. Innovative links with the community through very recent development of mainstream 'satellites' for ASD pupils is impressive. The very wide range of high quality vocational, community and work- related opportunities prepares pupils very well for life beyond school. The evening youth club is very well attended, not only by pupils, but also young people in the local community. This is outstanding positive inclusion in practice, and just one aspect of integration that is embedded so deeply at Bower Grove. Provision for physical education is excellent, and mathematics, music, science, art and much-improved information and communication technology (ICT) provision are all strong areas. Social skills and healthy living are supported very well by extended learning, lunchtime clubs, residential trips and cultural visits, broadening pupils' life experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The attention given to pupils' well-being and personal development is at the heart of the school's work. Staff know their pupils very well and often go that step beyond in supporting both them and their families. Parents' views reflect the close partnership they have with the school. A comment echoed by many was, 'I trust the staff 100% with my child.' New pupils settle very quickly and are supported and nurtured along with every other pupil so that they are able to learn. Strategies for managing behaviour are excellent and are making a real difference, so that challenging behaviour is reduced and the need for exclusion is rare. The range and extent of support from outside agencies is excellent and readily available. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are robust. Whilst academic guidance is good, the targets to enable pupils to improve in their learning are not always precise or personalised enough to impact on their individual progress. The school has improved its assessment systems well and these are being developed further so that the very good procedures, for example in mathematics, are extended in all subjects. Older students receive high quality guidance and advice about future life and employment options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The shared vision of the headteacher and the leadership team are evident in the innovative developments currently being put in place. These are designed to improve facilities for pupils and support the school's ethos of inclusion. The ASD satellite classes are already having an

impressive impact on the achievement of the pupils attending. The headteacher is skilful at driving through change. His commitment and attention to the pastoral care and nurture of staff and pupils have led, in the words of one parent, to 'the atmosphere and ethos being just wonderful!' Teamwork is outstanding within the leadership team and throughout the school, and this contributes effectively to pupils' learning. Management at all levels is effective but the school has correctly identified the need to extend the role of middle managers further so that they are more involved in raising achievement within their subject areas. Governors have supported ongoing change well and the school has clearly identified targets, many of which are challenging.

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

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

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

We think that your school is doing a good job and provides you with a good education. Staff are very caring and we know you have excellent relationships with everyone who looks after you. You are making good progress and we know that your teachers are good at helping you to learn. We can see that you like them a lot. We think that your behaviour and personal development is excellent – well done! We also know you enjoy the excellent range of activities provided for you like sport, ICT and going on trips. You have told us that you think you could do better, so we would really like you to work hard at your reading and writing. We also think that the targets you have to help you learn could be better so that you are clear about what you have to do. You older pupils are excited at the thought of going to college or work, and are given very good support in preparing you for when you leave school. We think your school is well run, with lots of people involved, making it better all the time.

Here are the things we have suggested to your school:

- Help you to improve your reading and writing skills.
- Improve the way teachers' check how well you learn so that the targets you have enable you to make the best possible progress.

We hope that you continue to do well and that you enjoy the rest of your time at school.