

Brandles School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131060
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	315703
Inspection date	27 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Burdis HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tara Geere
Headteacher	Mr David Vickery
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Weston Way Baldock Hertfordshire SG7 6EY
Telephone number	01462 892189
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Brandles is a special school for boys aged 11 -16 with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils are admitted to the school after periods of disruptive education. Because of this, the standards they have achieved on entry are usually below the national average, especially in reading and spelling. Some have additional moderate learning difficulties and one fifth have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. Over a quarter of pupils are looked-after by the council and over a third receive free school meals. A small number are from minority ethnic groups. Following the very successful inspection in 2004 and retirement of the headteacher the school entered a turbulent period and the good provision was not sustained. The local authority identified it as a school causing concern and has provided additional support. A permanent headteacher was appointed in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Brandles School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Some aspects of the school's provision are now good but have not been in place long enough to impact fully on learning outcomes. Strong leadership from the headteacher and support from the local authority have re-established a calm and purposeful learning environment. Boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties are guided and supported well to deal with the challenges they face and improve their educational attainment. Academic achievement is satisfactory and personal development is good. The behaviour management strategy is very effective in encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their behaviour; they progress well in their personal development, attendance is improving and in the last year there have been almost no exclusions or incidents causing concern. Looked after children attend regularly and their achievement is similar to that of other pupils in the school. The school is developing its skills and provision for meeting the needs of pupils diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder and they make adequate progress against targets set for them. The school sets appropriately challenging and realistic targets, taking into account the unique circumstances of each pupil. Progress in English, mathematics and physical education is good. The overall academic achievement of individuals depends on the length of time they have been in the school and the age at which they joined. Attainment is measured by external tests such as end of key stage tests and GCSE when appropriate but alternative accreditation for those with learning difficulties is under developed.

Teaching is satisfactory and never less than this, however sometimes approaches used in lessons limit opportunities for pupils to work in groups or to develop their own ideas. The curriculum is satisfactory. It is appropriate in Key Stage 3 with a good vocational education programme introduced in Key Stage 4. Pupils access mainstream schools and college courses to extend their curricular experience when appropriate. Access to information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection and there is an appropriate focus on improving literacy skills. The very good arrangements for liaising with families, carers and outside agencies support all aspects of pupils' social and emotional development. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status and there are appropriate opportunities for pupils to eat healthily and engage in sport. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good and they learn to be aware of hazards and adopt safe practices in practical lessons. Pupils enjoy the small class sizes, respond well to adult attention and engage well with their learning and school activities. They contribute to their school community with older pupils supporting younger ones, successful involvement in recycling and the development of an environmentally friendly school. However, the school council is not currently running so does not provide a forum for them to express their views. The focus on promoting literacy skills satisfactorily develops pupils' skills for economic well-being. The vocational education programme offers good training in workplace learning skills. The school is well managed, provides satisfactory value for money and has a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop alternative accreditation pathways for those with learning difficulties.
- Maintain the focus on improving teaching from satisfactory to good.
- Extend the range of teaching styles and activities that promote independent learning and group work.
- Re-instate the school council.

A small proportion of schools judged to be satisfactory but with areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils enter the school with below average standards in most areas of learning. Achievement is at least satisfactory. Pupils' progress during their time at the school is good in personal development, English, mathematics and physical education. Their progress in science and other subjects is satisfactory. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, make satisfactory progress because their attendance and behaviour improves. The school is aware of individual circumstances that have been barriers to previous achievement and provides a secure and safe environment where a pupil can achieve socially and academically. Physical restraint and exclusions are rare, reflecting good progress in personal development. Key Stage 4 pupils who attended well in 2007, achieved 3 to 5 GCSEs graded C to G. All pupils achieved Adult Literacy Level 1 and modules towards an information and communication technology (ICT) accreditation. However, the introduction of certificates for lower attaining pupils through recognised accredited courses has not proved successful and strategies for accrediting performance at this level are under developed. Good systems for regularly checking how well pupils are doing and careful planning to help them meet their targets are strengthening further their progress and raising their self esteem and confidence.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A very effective behaviour management system underpins the personal development and well-being of pupils. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Daily assemblies and the positive relationships pupils establish with adults promote spiritual and moral development well. Music contributes well to pupils' awareness of cultural diversity. Arrangements for supporting pupils promote positive attitudes to learning, good behaviour and respect for the school environment. Attendance is good. Pupils say they enjoy their education and like the very clear structure to the day and regular feedback about their behaviour. Recorded incidences of bullying or racist incidence have reduced to almost none. Exclusions are rare and the recorded number of pupils out of lessons has reduced dramatically. Pupils readily accept the need for safety clothing and consider health and safety requirements in vocational education sessions. There is clear acceptance of the school's no smoking policy. Pupils make a positive contribution to their school community, as through a successful recycling project and older boys acting as mentors to younger ones. Pupils learn about the contribution they can make to society through citizenship lessons and regular fund raising events. However, the school council is not currently running and not all pupils know how they could contribute to decision making about events in school. They develop workplace and other skills that may contribute to their future economic well-being through vocational education, but lesson planning in other subjects does not always provide sufficient opportunities to develop problem solving, questioning and leadership skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The school evaluates teaching as never less than satisfactory and good in almost a half of lessons. This is confirmed by inspection evidence. Pupils make the best progress in English, mathematics and physical education where there is consistently good teaching. Assessment is used well to monitor pupils' progress. All classrooms are purposeful learning environments and a common planning format encourages teachers to consider the different needs of pupils in the group. The consistent management of behaviour ensures that pupils are ready to learn. The pupils say they get on better at Brandles than in their previous schools because of the help they receive. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution to the orderly climate for learning. They are most effective when deployed to support learning rather than maintaining behaviour. In some lessons teachers do not plan activities that provide opportunities for pupils to work together or develop their own ideas. The clear structure to lessons supports the learning of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides opportunities for pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, to make at least satisfactory progress. In Key Stage 3, all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and a good programme of vocational education is introduced in Key Stage 4. Improvements to the school's medium and long-term plans provide increasing opportunities for a broad and relevant range of curriculum opportunities. A focus on improving literacy skills is having a positive impact on reading to support learning across the curriculum. However, in the lessons seen the delivery of the curriculum was not well planned to meet individual needs or to provide opportunity for pupils to work together to share ideas or apply their literacy skills. Provision for ICT has improved and is used frequently to support learning across the curriculum. There are no after school clubs due to the need for pupils to take taxis to get home at the end of the day. However, a range of activities during the school day and sporting links with neighbouring secondary schools make valuable contributions to pupils' social development. While the personal, health, social and citizenship education (PHSCE) programme has been identified by the school as in need of further development, it satisfactorily covers healthy lifestyles, including the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse, and advice on sex and relationship education. Pupils are prepared appropriately for their future economic well-being with an effective vocational education programme, strong work-related curriculum and successful work experience placements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good, with some aspects of outstanding practice in the procedures for supporting social and emotional needs. There are good incentives to maintain good behaviour over time and pupils respond well to this challenge. They take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their own behaviour and record their success daily. Weekly reports to parents and carers are part of the very effective links with home. Pupils' academic performance is monitored regularly and action taken to help pupils improve their work, for example, the looked-after children teaching-team will provide additional out of hours support if requested.

The school's well-structured day and behaviour strategy positively support outcomes for pupil with autistic spectrum disorder. Some marking of work is inconsistent and pupils are not always clear about their academic targets, although these are regularly set and monitored. Older pupils receive appropriate careers advice on pathways after school. All parents responding to a questionnaire feel strongly that their children are safe and well cared for in school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher has addressed weaknesses and created a common sense of purpose with a clear focus on raising achievement. The school has been put on a secure footing. The effective senior management team monitors and evaluates the work of the school well. They are aware of what needs to be done to ensure consistent achievement across subjects and an effective school improvement plan clearly outlines how further improvements will be achieved. Good use is made of performance data to identify where aspects of the school need improvement. The school has set appropriately challenging and realistic targets, taking into account the unique circumstances of each pupil. A home liaison manager works closely with parents and carers and is very effective in ensuring the needs of pupils and families are both known and appropriately supported. Governors make an active contribution to the work of the school and ensure safeguarding procedures such as safe recruitment practices are robust. As many governors are new, further development is necessary to develop their role as critical friends and provide appropriate challenge in raising attainment. There is good capacity for further improvement. Resources are used well to improve outcomes and to secure satisfactory value for money.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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	2
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	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 November 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Brandles School, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6EY

I want to thank you for making me feel so welcome in your school. I am sorry that I was only with you for one day. I enjoyed attending your lessons and thank those of you who talked to me about your work and looked after me so well at lunch time.

I think the Mr Vickery and all the staff work hard to make the school a safe and happy place where you can get on with learning. I think the main strengths of your school are the following.

- Your behaviour is usually good and you have good systems for helping you to do even better. You are often thoughtful and helpful to each other.
- All the adults in the school want to help you deal with any problems you have so you can do as well as you can.
- Teachers know how well you are doing and plan to help you achieve even more.
- You are getting good support to develop your English and literacy skills.
- The school is very good at working with your parents/carers in helping you to attend school and make as much progress as you can.

Mr Vickery is very clear about the things he wants to do to improve the school even more. These are the most important.

- Increase the range of courses in Key Stage 4 so older pupils can achieve certificates to show how well they have done.
- Make sure that all teaching is good and you are encouraged to develop your own ideas and work together more.
- Introduce a school council so you can share your good ideas about the development of the school.

I hope you will continue to make such a positive contribution to your school by continuing to behave as well as you do.

With best wishes

Kathryn Burdis HMI