

The Bridge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103624
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323869
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Graham Pirt

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	59
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rod Crowley
Headteacher	Adrian Coleman
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	290 Reservoir Road Erdington Birmingham B23 6DE
Telephone number	0121 4648265
Fax number	0121 4647619

Age group	2–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is based on two sites, one in Sutton Coldfield and the other in Erdington, the result of a merger of two schools two years ago. Each site has an Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Almost a third of pupils also have associated autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). There is a significant proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a high proportion are eligible for free school meals. There are two children in the care of the local authority. One of the sites has a residential unit which was not part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Bridge is a good school. It is a friendly, purposeful community in which pupils get great delight from their work and other activities. The good leadership and management ensure that all learners make good academic progress and outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being. The good Early Years Foundation Stage provision allows children to make good progress in their learning and outstanding progress in their personal development. All parts of the accommodation are used to best effect, including the corridors that contain high quality displays of pupils' work. The outdoor classrooms on both sites lack sufficient cover to extend their use in all weathers. Parents and carers are virtually unanimous in their praise of what the school enables their children to achieve. Typical of their views are comments such as, 'I have nothing but respect and admiration for the school and staff.' The pupils expressed the view that they loved coming to the school and this is shown by the good attendance of those not affected by individual medical conditions. Pupils are enthusiastic in lessons and make the most of their time in school, demonstrating good behaviour and excellent attitudes. The high expectations by adults encourage pupils to respond very well, and so they learn at a good rate. Teaching is good overall but has some excellent features and this, along with a good curriculum, helps accelerate pupils' learning from low starting points so that they make good progress. Very strong teamwork between all adults contributes to this to a large extent. The severity of pupils' learning needs means that standards remain well below the national averages for all age groups. The good rate of learning is supported by the school's excellent level of care and guidance. Thorough recording and tracking of pupils' progress is generally used well to plan lessons. However, planning for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders does not always focus on individual needs with sufficient precision in order to pre-empt pupils' demands. Where pupils' behaviour is made difficult by their educational needs, it is managed very well. Relationships are outstanding throughout the school, which is a very safe and supportive community helping pupils thrive. Much of the school's success in this respect is due to the excellent teamwork between staff and their colleagues from other agencies, such as a range of therapists and personal care staff. Very close liaison provides an impressive approach to working with the pupils and their families. Very strong links with other partners including local mainstream schools are very successful in extending pupils' social and learning opportunities and to ease transition into their next stage of learning. The school's self-evaluation procedures accurately identify the major priorities and assist in measuring the extent of progress towards achieving challenging targets. There is limited cross-site monitoring by staff to ensure a moderated view of progress. Governors support the school leaders very well and are actively involved with the school's developments, having a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their monitoring of the school's work. They hold the school to account, particularly in relation to the effective designated governors' links, and work to ensure best value.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in their learning and physical development and outstanding progress in their personal development. Good quality facilities and resources on both sites support a curriculum appropriate to Early Years Foundation Stage, although covered protection for the outdoor classroom is not available and this restricts some opportunities. Rigorous procedures to assess and monitor the children's work and their activities are well matched to

the small steps in learning children need from their very low starting points. The staff know the children very well and give a high level of individual attention with excellent relationships. Learning remains fun on both of the sites. The promotion of children's welfare is outstanding and pupils feel safe and secure at all times. There are very effective partnerships with parents that continue through the school. The children are very well cared for and consistently encouraged to understand the importance of keeping safe and healthy. The department, which is well led and managed within the school, is to benefit from the appointment of a new leader for this stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the curriculum for a small number of pupils with complex Autistic Spectrum Disorders to provide greater precision and individualisation.
- Increase the cross-site monitoring by senior staff to ensure a consistent view of provision.
- Seek to provide cover for the outside classroom in Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils have very low starting points and so their success is measured in small steps. Pupils' assessment and tracking records and analysis of individual education plan targets show that the majority of pupils make good progress and all pupils make at least satisfactory progress. Therefore, pupils' achievements are good as they gain key literacy, numeracy and communication skills. They build on these skills very effectively by using them across all subjects of the curriculum. This helps to prepare them very well for moving on to secondary school. Pupils' needs are met equally effectively in the majority of cases. A very small number of pupils with complex Autistic Spectrum Disorders only make progress through the high levels of attention given to them. A good level of focus on alternative methods of communication helps considerably with this important aspect of pupils' development. The school's very effective analysis of individuals' and groups' progress helps ensure that any underachievement within the school is addressed. Pupils make great progress in acquiring the necessary independence and self-help skills. All pupils benefit from the very well planned inclusion programme with mainstream school partners practising newly acquired skills, both personal and academic, by working alongside pupils from these schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are given very good opportunities for independence and responsibility. Along with other opportunities, the exemplary involvement of pupils in the organisation of taxis at end of the day is a shining example of raising their feelings about themselves. Pupils take great pride in their work. They participate well in spiritual activities, such as when a group of pupils with autism sat in silence in a blacked out room passing a light around, thinking about the work they had done. Pupils are able to talk about their responsibilities within the school council. Behaviour in the school is generally good and, where it is part of their need, it is managed well with pupils knowing right from wrong. Social participation in lessons is very good where they work together and support other pupils. There are many experiences of cultural diversity through visits to places of worship and sharing in the celebration of different festivals along with their parents. Pupils engage in maintaining healthy lifestyles through visits to outdoor residential centres and by making choices of healthy food. They know how to keep safe in physical activities,

and being aware of helping others to keep safe, such as those with visual impairments. They enjoy school and are clearly happy children participating in activities and showing pleasurable responses. Attendance is affected by the number of pupils with medical difficulties but is good overall. Contribution to the community is very strong through inclusion links and by supporting both local and national charities. Pupils make produce and sell it on stalls at parent support groups helping their understanding of economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and there are many examples where outstanding elements are present. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' special educational needs and this helps to ensure that they make good progress. Activities are very well linked to pupils' abilities and so they are engaged in their learning activities. Speaking and listening skills are developed very well and are often supplemented by additional means such as symbols, objects of reference and communication devices and strategies, which are used well. Teaching expertise is evident, supporting much learning through the active and creative planning of tasks. Teachers' very clear planning is communicated to teaching assistants and there is excellent teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants and support staff so all know their roles and responsibilities during lessons. All staff have very trusting relationships with the pupils, encouraging and celebrating effort and achievement with lots of praise and rewards. Therefore, pupils try hard and really enjoy their learning. The assessment during lessons is usually at least good, recording what pupils have done against their targets, but occasionally opportunities to record pupils' responses are missed. Work with parents, in supporting pupils' learning, through the individual education plans, and particularly through the Parents' Support Group workshops, is excellent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The pupils receive a good range and quality of learning opportunities. These are provided through a well planned and delivered curriculum that meets statutory requirements. This is enriched well by a variety of other activities. Educational visits feature within planning, including residential experiences. The inclusion work in which pupils from partner mainstream schools visit and work with pupils is a very powerful sign of the strong inclusive nature of The Bridge School. Regular visitors to the school include those from different beliefs, cultures and traditions, and the visits to places in the community, including those to take part in sporting and artistic events, provide opportunities for pupils to gain in confidence by demonstrating the social skills they learn in school. The celebration of festivals of different cultures involving families is particularly strong. The curriculum for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders is not always sufficiently individualised and does not always address the precise needs in order to improve learning, resulting in the need for greater attention to maintain their learning opportunities. Computers and other additional communication aids support and extend pupils' learning opportunities very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care of pupils is a strength of the school where everyone is treated with dignity. Procedures for ensuring the safeguarding of children are rigorous and meet requirements. They are well maintained and training requirements for staff are fulfilled. The considerable amount of medication administered by the school is all very well managed and recording of its use is strict. Pupils' contributions are highly valued and this supports them in making the good progress, guided by the results of assessments. There are many opportunities for pupils to make choices. Individual education plans show a very good understanding of the needs of the pupils. Targets are set and are challenging. There are very strong links with parents through the home/school liaison worker and this helps support pupils in school. There is good equality of opportunity and pupils all have the chance to participate in a range of activities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, who has been in post for less than a year, supported very well by senior staff, has responded well to the difficulties of a school on two sites with pupil populations that are different. There is a clear vision for the future of the school and a drive and determination to fully achieve that vision. They have managed to extend the cohesiveness of the two sites to becoming one school, meeting the challenge of the increased level of complex needs. Statutory targets meet requirements and targets for raising individual achievement are good. Underpinning all of their actions is a commitment to very high levels of care and learning opportunities for all pupils and this is shared and implemented in practice by all staff. Self-evaluation is recognised as an important tool in helping develop the school but shared monitoring across both sites is not yet fully implemented. Leaders analyse assessment data to make sure that all groups of pupils, regardless of the nature of their learning needs, gender, ethnicity or circumstances, achieve equally well. Resources are used well, despite the inherent difficulties of the efficient management of staff and resources across two sites. The school promotes community cohesion well through the many events linking to the local and wider communities. Excellent links with partner schools and multicultural experiences provide pupils with a greater understanding of the world in which they live. Governors work very well in supporting and aiding the school's development and in monitoring the school's performance. The accommodation is cramped with narrow corridors, although it is used to best advantage.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

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

1 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Bridge School, Birmingham, B23 6DE

Thank you for making us both feel welcome when we visited the two sites of your school. You told us that your school is good and that you love going there. We can see why you think that and we agree with you. The Bridge School is a good school.

Teachers give you lots of interesting and fun things to do and so lessons are good. You listen carefully and work very hard, and most of you go to school as often as you can. Because of this, you make a lot of progress in your work. All of the staff take very good care of you and help you a great deal with your work. They also help you make the right choices and this will help you as you grow up. You know how to stay safe and how to live a healthy life. You also learn a lot about how to get along with other people.

The people who run your school are doing a good job. They have lots of ideas about how they can make your school even better. We have given them a few more things to do:

- Plan some very small parts of lessons for a few pupils so that they learn even better.
- Let senior staff from each site check what is happening in the other site.
- Provide cover for the outside areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

You can help them to make sure that The Bridge School stays this good by going to school as much as you can and behaving very well while you are there. Finally, thank you once again and I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future, especially if you are going to a new school in September.

Yours faithfully

Graham Pirt

Lead inspector