

The Brier School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103878 |
| Local Authority | Dudley |
| Inspection number | 323922 |
| Inspection date | 17 September 2008 |
| 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.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 4–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 143 |
| 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 | Roger Timmins |
| Headteacher | Russell Hinton |
| Date of previous school inspection | 7 December 2005 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Bromley Lane Kingswinford DY6 8QN |
| Telephone number | 01384 816000 |
| Fax number | 01384 816001 |

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|--------------------------|-------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Brier School provides for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and those with speech, language and communication difficulties. An increasing number of the school's population have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or medical issues in addition to their learning needs. There is an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Brier School is an outstanding school because pupils make excellent progress both academically and in their personal development. These achievements are supported by outstanding teaching and a curriculum which, because of the high level of inclusion that takes place and the other enhancements, provides very well for the differing needs of all the learners. The pupils love coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing that they enjoy their lessons and that the school wants them to do as well as they can. One parent's comment was typical: 'When he first started he had no confidence, no self-esteem and hated everything about school. He now likes coming to school. He is like a different child.' The pupils feel safe and are very well supported in the welcoming and very caring ethos of the school. They understand about keeping healthy, choosing to eat healthy food, taking part in physical activities and keeping themselves safe. They behave very well and value the school, and this is evident through the outstanding relationships they have with staff, their very good attendance and the obvious pride they have in the school and their own achievements. One parent said, 'He regards holidays as a largely unwanted interruption to coming to school', and this was reinforced by a pupil who said 'I really enjoy going to school and having different lessons. The teachers are great.'

Pupils in the EYFS make a very good start to their education as they make excellent progress. Learning activities throughout the school are characterised by the high quality of support given to pupils by teachers, who are well qualified to understand and meet their learning needs, the well-trained teaching assistants and by the very high expectations that all adults have for the pupils' success. Pupils with autism and those with other speech, language and communication needs are provided with learning activities that challenge them to achieve to the best of their abilities. No group in the school achieves less well than any other.

The high quality of the school's procedures for assessing pupils' overall achievement enables teachers to keep a close eye on pupils, planning work to ensure they achieve as well as they can. The consistent method of tracking this progress is exemplary and provides a clear picture of progress over time. Opportunities are occasionally missed to track progress in the short term by recording pupils' responses more closely during lessons. The extremely wide range of opportunities that enrich the curriculum is outstanding. The opportunities to attend mainstream schools and to have those pupils join them are exemplary and a strength of the school. In addition, pupils can take part in musical celebrations and sporting events at other schools, and this wide range of other inclusion opportunities adds to the pupils' enjoyment of school and has a significant impact on their self-confidence and social development. Brier School has excellent links with the community and is very highly regarded locally because of its valuable work in supporting and working with mainstream schools and its work in the community, such as supporting charities.

The headteacher's clear vision and commitment to the pupils and staff have enabled him to give outstanding leadership to the school and have led to the formation of a very talented, hardworking senior management and staff team who are equally committed. The governing body monitors the school's work very effectively and has, over years, continually challenged leaders to improve provision for the learners. The school evaluates its own work very well. It has consistently improved provision since the previous inspection, when it was judged a good school. There is an outstanding capacity to continue this improvement as the school undertakes even more developments in the very attractive and well-maintained modern building.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make outstanding progress in their communication and other skills and in their personal and social development, from a very low starting point. Indeed some pupils do not score on the EYFS profile on entry. The opportunities to work with mainstream pupils are of the highest quality and contribute to the very good progress in their personal skills and behaviour which means that in class they behave well and engage readily in learning activities. One parent remarked that her child was a changed child and that she was 'amazed at the progress in a couple of weeks'. Pupils thrive within the EYFS and clearly enjoy their work, and this provides a very good basis for their learning as they move up through the school. There are excellent procedures to assess and monitor the children's work and their activities are very well matched to appropriate small steps in learning. Children receive a high level of individual attention and relationships are excellent. There are excellent partnerships with parents that start with a thorough induction process. The children are very well cared for and through consistent encouragement are beginning to understand the importance of keeping safe and healthy. The leadership and management of the EYFS are outstanding and there has been excellent improvement from the previous inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help support staff to record the responses of pupils in different parts of the lessons thus refining the assessment process.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All the pupils in the school achieve very well and make outstanding progress. Although overall the pupils' levels of attainment remain well below average, they continue to progress as fast and as far as they can and so realise their potential. For instance, the pupils with MLD, including some of those with autistic spectrum disorders, achieve levels of accreditation above those previously expected including GCSE awards. Pupils with lower starting points, whose success must be measured by smaller steps, make progress at a rate which is outstanding, as shown through the pupil profiles, assessment and tracking records and analysis of individual education plan (IEP) targets. A high level of focus on signing, symbols and other aids helps considerably with the communication needs of younger pupils. The school's highly effective analysis of each pupil's progress helps ensure that there is no underachievement by any individual or group. Pupils make excellent progress in meeting challenging targets in their IEPs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development as they respond so well to the excellent relationships between themselves and staff, displaying very positive attitudes. They respond exceptionally well to the many sporting, artistic, musical and other cultural opportunities in and out of school. The pupils have an excellent understanding of the value of exercise and healthy eating because of the extensive personal, health and social education (PHSE) programmes and very good opportunities to take part in physical exercise including the excellent programme afforded by the Castle Award. Their behaviour is excellent both in class and around the school. Attendance is above average despite being increasingly affected by a small number

of pupils with medical conditions. The pupils feel safe and confident and know what is expected from them. They learn how to keep themselves safe and report that there is no bullying or intimidation. They said, 'We fall out now and again but we always make up.' Spiritual aspects of the curriculum have improved from the previous inspection and are now good with examples in lessons and assemblies. The very well planned activities and celebrations mean that pupils have a very good awareness of cultural diversity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The consistently high quality of teaching has been achieved through rigorous and effective monitoring by senior staff and subject leaders. The well-qualified teachers know their pupils very well and this enables them to plan challenging, well-paced and interesting activities so ensuring that they make outstanding progress. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils' achievements and these are shared by the support staff. The pupils therefore enjoy their lessons extremely well and try their best. Progress is identified in planning by setting challenging targets over time based on rigorous assessment. There is excellent teamwork although on occasions support staff could be used more to record pupils' responses, adding to the assessment information. There are exemplary relationships between staff and pupils, and pupils receive high levels of individual support, giving them the confidence to try new things themselves.

Teachers manage the pupils extremely well so that behaviour is outstanding around the school, and any challenging behaviour is handled calmly and with understanding and support for the pupil involved. Pupils understand and respond well to clear routines. This helps teachers to maintain a clear focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is extensively adapted to meet individual pupils' needs and incorporates extensive personal development opportunities. It is hugely enriched by the work pupils undertake in mainstream schools and by pupils visiting from them. The wealth of links also include business, sports, arts and leisure providers. The specialist teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 provides a curriculum that is responsive to the pupils' various needs and support staff ensure that all pupils can take advantage of the full range of activities, including following courses in partner schools. The very effective monitoring ensures that the curriculum is continually developing as learners' needs change. There is excellent provision throughout the school for developing pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. This increases their access to learning in other subjects. There are very good programmes to prepare pupils for the next stage in their lives, for example those for pupils in Key Stage 4 who undertake carefully chosen work experience and have opportunities for college placements. The outstanding provision for personal development has a positive impact on pupils' confidence and self-esteem. The excellent modern accommodation is used to great effect in supporting the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils' care and support are central priorities of all staff and are outstanding. Academic guidance, based on the very thorough assessment procedures, is also outstanding. The staff make every

effort to ensure that all of the pupils' needs are met, ensuring that they are in the best possible position to learn and develop their personal skills. There is excellent support from outside professionals and agencies enhanced by the school's own provision of extra input for speech, language and communication. The school supports good attendance very effectively, leading to above average attendance, and systems to safeguard pupils are excellent. Pupils benefit from the excellent support given to parents when there may be difficulties, with one parent stating 'The staff are always happy to help parents and students.' The outstanding level of assessment and recording of the pupils' achievement means that parents receive a high standard of information at the annual review and other meetings as well as advice on helping their children through family and home targets. This leads to very effective guidance, with pupils being as aware of their targets as their learning needs allow. Older pupils receive very good support and guidance as they are about to take the next steps in their lives, with all pupils who left last year going on to further study.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's very clear vision and direction are essential elements in the school's success and improvement and have led to the creation of a leadership team that shares a strong sense of purpose. They are supported by staff who benefit from outstanding training opportunities to develop skills necessary for the changing needs of the pupils. Together they have created a highly cohesive community with an exemplary inclusion programme, recognised as such by outside agencies. School leaders have a very good overview of pupils' achievements through the excellent assessment and tracking procedures, ensuring that all pupils have equal access to the excellent learning opportunities and that targets are both relevant and challenging. The very effective self-evaluation procedures help managers to be rigorous and effective in the way they improve every aspect of the school's performance through challenging targets. Governors work closely with senior staff and have a very clear view of the strengths of the school and the developments needed, having been closely involved in the many changes over recent years. A parent remarked that, 'The management of the school is superb, there is excellent communication and concerns are resolved quickly.'

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 1 |
| 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? | 1 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 1 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 1 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 1 |

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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 1 |
| 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

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 1 |
| 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 |

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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 |
| 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**

18 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Brier School, Kingswinford, DY6 8QN

Not long ago, Mrs Logan and I came to the school to see how you were getting on. We wanted to see whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting you all. We thought your singing in assembly was superb. Thank you again, as you were all very kind to us.

We were only with you for one day but we could see that you go to an outstanding school. You all enjoy school very much. Here are some of the things we liked about your school.

- You work hard and make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development.
- There are many different people at the school who look after you very well to help keep you healthy and safe.
- You have an excellent range of things to do. They help you become independent, make choices, learn how to behave well and prepare for life after school.
- We particularly liked the opportunities you have to attend other schools and work with other pupils.
- You receive excellent teaching.
- The school is very good at tracking how well you are doing from year to year.
- Your headteacher and other senior staff run the school extremely well and everyone, including your parents, gives them good support.

We have asked the school to do something to make things even better. We would like some staff to make more notes about how you are working in lessons. We hope you all get on well in the future. Please thank your parents for all the very helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Yours sincerely

Graham Pirt