

Brimsham Green School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109319
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	324948
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Anthony Shield

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1159
Sixth form	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Lott
Headteacher	Alun Williams
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Broad Lane Yate Bristol BS37 7LB
Telephone number	01454 868888
Fax number	01454 868880

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Inspection number	324948

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Brimsham Green is larger than most other comprehensive schools. It draws its students from Yate and the surrounding area. Most students are from a White British background, although there are small numbers of students from a range of other ethnic heritages. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Provision for students with physical disabilities is made within the Resource Base at the school. These students are fully integrated into lessons. Provision in the sixth form is shared and teaching carried out in collaboration with two partner schools. The school has specialist status in humanities. A new headteacher started in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Brimsham Green is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. The sense of energy and purpose generated by the new headteacher has resulted in impressive improvements in the last six months. The school's ambition is clear and it is one which the whole school community has adopted with enthusiasm. Staff have welcomed this clarity and purpose. Students themselves comment how much they enjoy the fresh demands put on them, and many parents recognise the determination and resolve which the headteacher has inspired. As one parent typically commented, 'The headteacher makes us feel that this school is going to get better and better.'

Students' achievements are satisfactory through the school and students reach broadly average standards from their starting points. Following several years when the trend in test and examination results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE was gently rising, in 2008 results dipped, and a number of students underachieved. Results in English and mathematics were not as good as in a number of other subjects at GCSE. This is being tackled successfully and the rising trend in results looks set now to improve more rapidly. This is the result of higher expectations, a sharper focus on students' progress, more challenging targets, and more consistent use of performance data to gear work to individual students' needs.

Students speak positively of the ethos of the school as one which is caring and where everyone gets on well with each other. Warm, friendly relationships amongst the whole school community are typical. Students enjoy coming to school and attendance is very high. Good personal development is encouraged by the good quality of care, guidance and support. Many students, including those with physical disabilities, attend a wide variety of after school clubs and activities. The inclusive nature of school activities is a distinctive feature of the school, and students with physical disabilities are seamlessly integrated into all school activities. Students' contribution to the local community is particularly strong. Sixth formers are involved in mentoring younger students and they are good role models for the younger students.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Inconsistencies in the quality are being ironed out through effective strategies to share best practice. The use of more challenging targets is encouraging both students and teachers to aim higher. Many teachers adopt effective strategies to develop students' learning skills and independence. However, this remains inconsistent and not all teachers are effective in ensuring students have responsibility for managing their own learning and know what to do to improve their work to meet their targets. The school's curriculum is satisfactory and is being refined to match students' aspirations more closely.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Given a clear lead by the headteacher, managers at all levels are responding positively, although their capacity to monitor and drive forward improvements on their own is uneven. Better use of performance data to set challenging targets and track the progress of students is already making a significant difference in raising aspirations. The school is making good use of its specialist status in humanities to improve provision. Given what has already been achieved, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Collaboration with partner schools through 'The Link' enables a good range of academic courses and an increasing range of vocational courses to be offered. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory, but there is some variability in the standards reached by students in different subjects. Whilst in most subjects, students perform in line with or above expectations, in some, performance has been below expected levels. Teaching, shared across the link schools, is satisfactory overall. Students have a good knowledge of their current attainment and understand what they need to do to improve. Retention rates are high and are evidence of the extent of students' enjoyment of the sixth form. Students respect their teachers and appreciate the time they give to caring and supporting them. Students take on a range of responsibilities, such as mentoring younger students, and often take the lead in supporting community groups, charities and international links. As a result, their personal development is good. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of sixth form and The Link director work well together and have a clear plan for development, although improving systems for monitoring provision across The Link rightly remains a priority.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build upon present initiatives to ensure that teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics, improve students' achievements, particularly at GCSE.
- Ensure all teachers provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for managing their learning, and have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and meet their learning targets.
- Build the capacity of leaders at all levels to monitor and review their areas of responsibility, take the initiative and manage change.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

At GCSE, results in different subjects vary. Good results in 2008 in design and technology, history, geography, biology and physics were not matched in other subjects, particularly English and mathematics. The percentage achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, fell in 2008 to 41%. However, determined intervention, including setting up a 'Learning Challenge' group, has been effective in tackling these issues and current Year 11 students are on track to achieve considerably better this year. There was some underachievement amongst Year 9 students in 2008, particularly in English and science. But improvements are evident at this level too, and students are set to achieve some challenging targets. Boys do not achieve as well as girls, but action taken to tackle this has also been effective and data shows that boys are increasingly narrowing the gap with the girls. Students with learning difficulties and those with physical disabilities in the Resource Base also make the same progress as their peers. This is because they are given well targeted support and made to feel included in all school activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students develop good personal skills and this is a strength of the school. Good relationships flourish throughout. Students' enthusiasm for school is reflected in excellent rates of attendance and the wholehearted participation in contributing to the school and wider community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are encouraged to think about others and they fundraise extensively for charitable causes. Sixth formers are particularly good role models in this respect, initiating and organising fundraising activities, organising local events and the school prom. Students have a deep understanding of their place in the world and their responsibilities as global citizens. This climate of tolerance and understanding towards others is characteristic and reflects the inclusive and reflective nature of the school. Students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is excellent and students use information from the school to inform their choices on a day to day basis. Students behave sensibly and thoughtfully to each other. Student surveys indicate that students feel safe, and that they have confidence that any bullying will be dealt with effectively. They know their views will be listened to and respected. Given students' satisfactory basic skills, their preparation for their economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is improving as the school puts in place strategies to ensure more consistency, and best practice is shared through the teaching and learning forum. In this respect, lead subjects within the specialist college have been in the forefront of teaching and learning developments. In the most effective lessons, students are challenged by tasks which meet their individual needs and a brisk pace of learning keeps students on their toes. Increasingly, challenging targets are being set. This is raising the game for everyone and students are relishing the opportunities to excel. Many lessons involve a range of interesting tasks and activities which both enthuse and motivate students. As a result, learning in most lessons is both purposeful and meaningful. Some outstanding practice was observed. In one Year 10 history lesson, the teacher's confident approach, quick-fire questioning and careful management of the learning encouraged students to think quickly and search for answers independently of the teacher. Less effective teaching offers students fewer opportunities to work in this way, and means they are too reliant on the teacher for answers and knowing how to improve their work. Too few students have the opportunity to manage their own learning in lessons. Most students work hard and concentrate well. Teaching assistants are well used to ensure all students feel included, supported and confident to achieve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

An improving curriculum, particularly in ensuring its relevance and interest, is being put in place. However, it is too early to identify sustained improvement in achievement because of this. Students increasingly engage in a variety of learning activities that suit their abilities and aptitudes. There is good provision for students with learning difficulties and increasingly for those with particular gifts and talents. Much work has gone into ensuring basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills are used well across the curriculum, including some effective work in

supporting students with low reading skills in Year 7. Nevertheless, the school recognises that more needs to be done to overcome the barrier of poor literacy skills of some students. The school's focus on providing a good understanding of careers options and the acquisition of workplace skills helps ensure students are prepared for their working futures. New courses and better provision in existing courses have already increased students' enjoyment and success in some subjects including, for example, child care, sports studies and i-media. Progression routes are clear and well established. Students identified as benefiting from an alternative curriculum pathway follow a good programme of vocational courses. Wide ranging opportunities for students to participate in trips and activities develop their understanding of both local and global communities well. The school's status as an International School is recognition of its work in this area.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good arrangements for the care, guidance and support of all students are threaded through all aspects of the school's work. Arrangements for the safeguarding and safety of all students are robust and rigorously enforced, and policies are regularly reviewed to meet best practice. Good procedures support students' attendance and ensure that attendance is given a high priority. The school's very effective practice in developing partnerships to encourage good attendance is recognised as best practice. There are improving systems to support learning to ensure students understand what they need to do to improve. Some oral feedback by staff to students and marking are exemplary, but this is not consistent and students are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The recently appointed headteacher has provided outstanding clarity of purpose and direction which is beginning to have an impact on achievement and teaching. He is deeply committed to securing quality in every aspect of the school's work. His leadership is complemented by a restructured senior management team and they work cohesively together. All members of the school community, including parents, have bought into this vision and there is a strong commitment to improvement through teamwork. Middle managers have embraced change enthusiastically and have a better understanding of their role. They feel listened to and as one head of department said 'we feel cared for but also accountable'. They are setting a clear direction for improvements in their areas of responsibility. However, their capacity to review practice critically and drive forward change is uneven. Whilst improvement is already evident, such as in more consistent approaches to behaviour management and the use of assessment, the school knows there is more to be done before measures adopted impact fully on students' learning and achievement. Good systems are now in place to track students' progress and increasingly effective use of performance data by all staff is being used to set targets and match these to current progress. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the school rightly recognises that there is a need for a wider involvement of all stakeholders in the process. Governors are actively involved through their committees and through individual visits. They are well informed and are confident in offering a balance of support and challenge. The school contribution to community cohesion is good in many respects, but is satisfactory overall because it has not yet formally evaluated its practice. The school has made good use of its specialist status within

humanities to strengthen and expand its community links, in particular through innovative work with the University of the Third Age. Important partnerships have also been developed with nearby primary schools.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
---	----------------	-------

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
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	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	

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

5 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Brimsham Green School, Yate BS37 7LB

- We very much enjoyed meeting you on our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming. Your school offers you a satisfactory education and has made some rapid and impressive improvements recently. These are the main findings of our report.
- Your enjoyment of school is reflected in the high attendance rates. Some of the best in the country!
- Your behaviour is good and some thoughtful acts of kindness were observed.
- Some aspects of your good personal development are especially good including your contribution to the community and understanding of healthy lifestyles. Sixth formers are good role models.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving all the time.
- The school takes great care of you, ensuring you feel safe and well looked after.
- The headteacher and all the teachers are working successfully to make your school even better.
- Most of you make satisfactory progress, but teachers need to give you more opportunities for taking responsibility for managing your own learning and working out how to improve your own work.
- There is room for improvement in the standards you reach at GCSE, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Managers at all levels need to develop the skills necessary to check how well things are going and initiate and manage changes to improve things even further.

You can certainly help the teachers with some of these things. Thank you once again for your help during our visit, and good luck with your work in the future!

Yours faithfully

Tony Shield

Lead Inspector