

The Brakenhale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110047
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	325089
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	820
Sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Young
Headteacher	Mr Paul Salter
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2005
School address	Rectory Lane Bracknell RG12 7BA
Telephone number	01344 423041
Fax number	01344 300397

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Brakenhale is a smaller-than-average mixed community secondary school with a small sixth form. The school has link sixth form arrangements with five schools and a local college of further education. The number on roll has increased rapidly since the last inspection, when it was 519. The number of students from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds is close to the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. The range of students' needs is broad and includes specific learning difficulties and behavioural and emotional difficulties. The number of students arriving during the school year is also high. The school has experienced considerable changes in staff due to its rapid expansion and some leadership and management posts are temporary.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Self-evaluation is thorough and the school is clear about its strengths and weaknesses. It also judges itself to be satisfactory. The school has a good capacity to make the necessary improvement because of the strength and vision at senior levels, which is shared by some middle managers. The pockets of underachievement are being tackled successfully and the rising trend in results looks set now to improve more rapidly. This is the result of higher expectations, more challenging targets and improved attendance. There is now an effective sixth form, where students are motivated and ambitious for themselves.

Students make satisfactory progress during their time in school, given their starting points and capabilities, and the proportion of students achieving five or more higher grades has increased steadily. Following several years when the trend in test and examination results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE were rising quickly, in 2008 results dipped, and a number of students underachieved. Students generally make greater progress during Key Stage 3 than during Key Stage 4. Here, while achievement is satisfactory overall, some boys and less-able students underachieve. An underlying cause has been the arrival of a significant minority of students with learning and behavioural difficulties combined with changes in the teaching staff. This has led to inconsistencies in how teaching has addressed the low levels of literacy and disruptive behaviour. The very large majority of lessons are at least satisfactory or better. However, some parents and students raise concerns about disruption that restricts other students' learning in a minority of lessons. This concern is shared by inspectors. Some teachers are highly skilled practitioners. Students respond very well to this high-quality teaching and make considerable progress in these lessons. However, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is inconsistent and a small proportion of lessons are inadequate. As many students in the school do not find learning easy, their progress and enjoyment decline dramatically in these lessons.

The curriculum is satisfactory and has some strong features. There is some good additional provision for basic literacy and numeracy and extra-curricular activities are numerous and well supported. However, students at Key Stage 4 have a narrow access to courses, some of which are not well matched to their needs and interests, and this limits some students' potential.

Staff work hard to meet students' often complex needs, and there are particular strengths in the care that the school provides. Academic support and guidance are developing, although they are inconsistent across the school. The school is regularly gathering data on students' progress, but evaluation is not developed and some students are unclear about their current level of achievement and targets. Students feel safe and report that bullying is dealt with well. Attendance is satisfactory. A number of new strategies and approaches have successfully involved parents.

Given a clear lead by the headteacher, managers at all levels are responding positively, although their capacity to evaluate students' progress and drive forward improvements on their own is uneven. Middle leadership is developing strongly and is helping strengthen capacity by bringing greater rigour to monitoring. However, some leaders and managers across the school are not yet evaluating progress data sufficiently to identify the impact of initiatives to strengthen teaching and learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form was judged inadequate at the last inspection. Since the appointment of a highly effective and enthusiastic Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for Key Stage 5, the transformation has been swift. Students say they are 'more focused' and 'have higher expectations of themselves'. This confidence is reflected in all the students being offered places at universities. The small-group teaching by good teachers leads to highly effective academic support and guidance. This combined with a programme of weekly tutorials, extra revision and a well-designed self-regulated study area has ensured that all students now make good progress and are on track to reach their targets. Students start sixth form with below-average attainment and all students are beginning to make good progress so far this year. Students enjoy sixth form life and play an active part in the school and local community. They develop excellent attitudes and are well supported by a very good programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that lessons provide the necessary enjoyment and challenge for middle and lower attainers, particularly boys.
- Provide a more relevant curriculum that matches the needs of the wide range of students that the school caters for.
- Improve the evaluation of progress data and use this more effectively to provide the appropriate match of work.

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

Students generally enter the school with standards that are below the national average. After a rapid rise in standards immediately after the last inspection, a more modest improvement has been evident in the last two years. A significant minority of students have experienced disruption to their learning by moving schools or being excluded and their attitudes to learning are low. Students make satisfactory progress overall at Key Stages 3 and reach standards that are a little below average. Girls often make better progress than boys. Progress in mathematics is better than English, although the recent sustained focus on reading is bearing fruit, particularly for boys. By the end of Year 11 there is significant variation in the performance of some students. A significant minority of boys do less well than expected and students at the lower end of average also underachieve. GCSE results increased in 2006, levelled in 2007 and dipped slightly in 2008. The percentage of five or more higher grades with English and mathematics was slightly below the 2008 target. The school has put in place a number of strategies to deal with this, including improving the use of data to set challenging targets for students. These are proving effective and most students are on track to achieve modestly challenging targets in this year's examinations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students have a positive attitude to learning and behave well when they are given interesting and engaging tasks. However, a minority of students quickly lose concentration in lessons where work is dull and repetitive, such as copying from worksheets. In a minority of lessons they disrupt their own and others' learning. Similarly, students generally behave well around the site, although there is still a minority who show a lack of respect to adults and other students. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly as a result of the good support given to those students integrating into the school. The school has also been extremely successful in working with families to reduce absence and persistent absence to levels that are now average.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, and they make a satisfactory contribution to the community. Members of the school council are keen to bring about improvements, particularly in extending their charitable work. Students understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the range of opportunities to take exercise and a large number attend sports clubs. The large majority of students feel safe in school and say that reported incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. The school remains vigilant and it is aware that some parents are still not convinced that the school has turned a corner in this regard. Students' preparation for life after school is satisfactory, and they benefit from the strong focus on learning functional literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most teachers have good subject knowledge. This is most apparent in the top sets, where teachers' high expectations and a range of techniques to encourage students' participation result in good progress. Teaching is often weaker in lower sets because students are less motivated to learn and the work is not interesting and challenging enough. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities often do better than those of higher ability in these lower sets because they get greater levels of support and guidance from additional adults. In the mixed-ability classes all students do well when motivated by practical work but less well when taught through a diet of worksheets. Behaviour in lessons is generally managed well, but when the lessons fail to inspire or challenge students appropriately, this results in low level disruption. Teachers' planning is inconsistent. In the best lessons the teachers are prepared with a series of questions to check and challenge students' thinking and this results in good learning by all. Some teachers skilfully use short breaks and the end of the lesson to assess how well the class is moving towards the lesson objectives. However, this better teaching is not yet widespread.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In Years 10 to 13 collaboration with local schools and the local Further Education College has broadened the range of courses offered to students, but the school recognises this has not gone far enough. There are still insufficient appropriate pathways for all students in Key Stage 4, particularly those of academically average and less able ability, to select a choice of options that best fits their needs and aspirations. This is reflected in some weaker achievements in non-core subjects. The development of a 14–19 curriculum is at an early stage and opportunity

for extended work experiences is narrow. There are, however, strong community links and a good range of enrichment activities that broaden the students' personal development. Recent modifications to the Key Stage 3 curriculum have improved provision for students in Year 7. These students are now taught through topics that develop their basic skills. Some good work in linking themes and subjects through the revised information and communication technology (ICT) programme of study is designed to inspire and motivate boys in particular. There is, however, a lack of well-matched work for students in Year 8 and 9. This reduces some students' progress and enjoyment of learning.

The curriculum provides well for the development of students' personal development, and there is good additional provision for those who require support for basic literacy and numeracy skills. Careers education and citizenship lessons prepare students adequately for the challenges ahead. Personal, social and health education ensures that students are sufficiently informed about healthy and safe lifestyles. The school promotes many sporting and creative activities that broaden students' experiences and help develop their leadership skills. These opportunities are popular with students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are extremely thorough. There are good systems for behaviour management and to reduce bullying, although not all teachers follow these consistently. Good procedures for promoting and monitoring attendance have led to significant improvement in reducing absence. Staff work closely with families and outside agencies to provide good levels of care for vulnerable students. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are given good support and this ensures they make good progress in their personal development. Academic support and guidance is satisfactory. Support programmes, for example to improve reading, help students to make satisfactory progress in their learning. Students who join the school during the year are given good support to help them to settle in and catch up. A number of good initiatives to link assessment to planning are becoming established, but there is not yet consistent implementation to ensure more than satisfactory impact on students' achievements. The regularity and quality of marking also vary considerably. As a result, not all students understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear focus on raising standards and promoting students' personal development. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The attention given to sustaining improvement in standards at Key Stage 4 and improving added value in the sixth form is proving effective. Self-evaluation is satisfactory; procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching performance across the school are clear and increasingly rigorous. Good systems are now in place to track students' progress and increasingly effective use of performance data by some staff is being used to set targets and match these to current progress. However the school rightly recognises that there is a need for more regular and high-quality analysis of progress data to ensure more rigour in target-setting.

The school is committed to promoting inclusion and students are well cared for and guided. It takes increasing account of the views of students and is in touch with parents and responds

to their concerns, although there is a small minority of parents who feel that this is an area for improvement. There are good links with external bodies which provide effective support for students' development.

Governors are committed and keen to ensure that the school does well. They have been adamant in seeking to employ only the best teachers, a task that has been made more difficult through the rapid growth in numbers. This has resulted in a number of temporary appointments of inconsistent quality. There are good arrangements for the professional development of all staff and the school is building on the sharing of good practice to improve consistency.

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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	16-19
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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	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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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 learners' needs?	3	2
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?	3	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	3	
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**

11 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Brakenhale School, Bracknell, RG12 7BA

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We judged the school to be satisfactory and improving.

Examination results have risen considerably since the last inspection and you make satisfactory progress in your time at school. We found this to be uneven for some of you, because not all the teaching is good enough. We saw some good lessons during the inspection. However, we also saw some lessons that were uninteresting. You and your parents tell us that some lessons are boring and this encourages a few of you to mess around and not concentrate. We have asked the school to focus very hard on increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons.

Staff work hard to care for and support you. They have done a great deal to help you improve attendance and you clearly have an important part to play in maintaining this improvement. We were very pleased to see some significant changes in the quality of your sixth form, particularly the curriculum choice. We consider that the curriculum offer for those joining Key Stage 4 is not as broad as it could be and does not really provide enough choice for some of you. Accordingly, we have asked school leaders to introduce a better match of courses to meet your needs.

There have been a number of recent changes to the school's leadership and management. Some parents have been unsettled by this. However, the changes are helping to improve the school. We have asked the school to ensure that the school's leaders and managers focus very sharply on how well you are making progress and look closely at the impact of the actions they are taking. In this way they will be able to focus their energies and enthusiasm on aspects of the school that require the greatest improvement. This will ensure that all of you are able to make good progress and enjoy your education.

The inspection team wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector