

Bettridge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115821
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326274
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Barter

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	97
Sixth form	6
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	Terry Mullins
Headteacher	Mary Saunders
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Warden Hill Road Cheltenham GL51 3AT
Telephone number	01242 514934
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with severe, profound and complex learning disabilities. An increasing number of pupils, currently one-third of the school population, have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Half of the primary pupils have ASD. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. One tenth of pupils are looked-after children. Most pupils are of White British heritage although a small number are from other minority ethnic backgrounds. A few have English as an additional language. Some children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) class, known as the Assessment Centre, although pupils join the school in all year groups from mainstream or other special schools. The post-16 unit is a specialist local authority provision for students with profound needs from this and other local schools, who are unable to access the local college provision. The school runs a summer holiday play scheme for its pupils and pupils with special needs from other cluster schools.

The school gained specialist status in Learning and Cognition (Learning Disabilities) in September 2006, the central aim of which is equipping pupils to take their place in society and equipping society to better understand and meet the needs of those with learning disabilities. The school holds the Healthy Schools, Artsmark Silver, Activemark and Sportmark awards. It is currently undergoing an extensive rebuilding programme, with final completion planned for October 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Bettridge School is outstanding. This is down to the first-class leadership of the headteacher, the strong, effective teamwork of staff and the excellent support and challenge offered by the governing body. Parents praise highly the difference the school makes to their children's learning and personal development, describing it as 'a fine school', 'excellent in every respect' and 'doing wonders'. One parent sums up the views of many others, saying, 'For my child, with all his needs, to have a place like Bettridge where he spends most of his days and is truly happy, I think the teachers and staff do an exceptional job!'

The school rises to the challenge of the initiatives it undertakes, evaluating meticulously their effectiveness in improving pupils' progress, so that successes are built on and key priorities for improvement identified accurately. Nowhere is this more evident than in the impact that the school's specialism has had on improving pupils' already outstanding achievements and in the exemplary contribution made to community cohesion. First and foremost, pupils' progress from the children in the EYFS class through to the students in the post-16 unit has accelerated beyond the excellence described at the previous inspection. The school uses all the data available to it, including new national comparisons, to question whether each and every pupil is achieving to their full potential. At the same time, the community plan has had an enormous impact on giving pupils a strong voice in their school and local community, and in helping others, through extensive partnerships, to develop a greater understanding of the needs of those with learning disabilities.

Pupils are superb ambassadors for young people with special needs. Their confident presentation to a large national conference about how Bettridge helps them to be involved in setting and reviewing their own targets for learning is just one example of pupils' outstanding personal development. Pupils' outstanding behaviour is remarkable, given the difficulties they have to overcome and the nature of their often complex additional needs. This is a direct result of the excellent care, guidance and support that is provided by the school and the exceptional links with other agencies.

At the very heart of pupils' academic and personal achievements, and their tremendous enjoyment of school, is the outstanding quality of teaching and learning. Lively and purposeful lessons, work which is well matched to pupils' differing needs and teachers' high levels of expertise and knowledge are key to pupils' success. The curriculum is good and well developed to prepare pupils for the next steps in education and future life. Everyone longs for the completion of the new building, being well aware that the accommodation continues to impose limitations on the teaching of subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT) and on some aspects of pupils' independent living skills. Even pupils say, 'Hurry up builders!' This is a school that thrives on challenge and has its sights clearly set on establishing the very best curriculum once in the new accommodation. It has outstanding capacity to make continued improvement in all aspects of its work.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Although standards are exceptionally low because of students' severe and complex learning disabilities, their achievement and personal development are outstanding. This is because highly skilled teaching and excellent leadership and management concentrate on raising achievement

while encouraging as much personal independence, confidence and quality of life as possible. The introduction this year of accreditation (ASDAN Transition Challenge) demonstrates the school's increased expectations of students' achievement throughout their learning and personal development. The good curriculum meets students' specific needs and their own interests through highly successful individual learning programmes. The current accommodation is used as well as possible to help students reach their goals but continues to limit some aspects of their learning, particularly opportunities for the development of independent living skills. Relationships in the unit between students and staff are very good, helping students to feel relaxed and supported in an appropriately mature manner. Students who are new to the school are helped sensitively to become accustomed to their surroundings and new routines and gain in confidence. Careful consideration is given to ensuring students and families have all the necessary support and information to make choices about which settings to choose when they leave.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children thrive in the Early Years class because they are nurtured so well. Parents and carers delight in the way their children are cared for and helped to engage in learning. The highest attention is given to children's personal welfare, helping them feel comfortable, safe and gain in confidence. The restricted accommodation and the outdoor area are carefully managed to ensure safe movement of adults and children. Children greatly enjoy daily routines to develop their social and communication skills and behave exceptionally well. Learning and play are pitched exactly right, motivating children to explore during exciting activities, such as mixing cereal, marshmallows and melted chocolate with fingers and spoons to make cakes. Adults are not afraid to join in with messy activities, with a great sense of fun pervading the very positive learning experience.

Although standards are much lower than usually seen at the end of the EYFS, children make outstanding gains from their exceptionally low starting points. This is due to high quality teaching by the staff team. Individual and flexible learning and sensory and therapeutic programmes are carefully planned and based on observations and assessments of children's development. Important focus is placed on the development of children's early literacy skills and their personal, social and emotional development. Physiotherapists and music therapists are highly effective in supporting and enriching children's development. The leadership and management of the provision are outstanding. Continuous monitoring and discussion are clearly focused on ensuring that the curriculum successfully meets children's very complex needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish the school community in its new accommodation, taking full advantage of the improved facilities to help pupils achieve their very best in all aspects of their learning and personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' standards are exceptionally low due to the nature of their severe learning disabilities, but their progress and achievements across the curriculum are outstanding. There is no significant variation in the progress of different groups of pupils, including those who have English as an additional language or who are looked after. There are clearly documented reasons

if pupils do not make the progress expected of them, such as significant periods of hospital treatment.

The school makes rigorous use of all the available assessment data to set challenging but realistic targets. When assessed against P Scales, almost all pupils make one to two levels of progress each year, with some making as much as four to six levels of progress. From the excellent start made in the EYFS, pupils in Years 1 and 2 make outstanding progress although they continue to operate at early developmental levels. The school's data for 2008 show that at the end of Years 6 and 9, over 90% of pupils fully achieved their targets for English, mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE), and targets for the specialist school plan were exceeded. Over three quarters of pupils fully achieved their targets at the end of Year 11. Expectations to increase progress further for pupils in Years 10 and 11 have been set through even more challenging targets for this year. Pupils achieve very well in pre-entry level accredited courses for communication and practical work skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school, saying, 'We really like it here because we learn to work with our friends.' They are tremendously proud of their achievements, having excellent attitudes and good attendance because they want to learn and do well. Pupils are respectful and caring of each other, understanding that others have needs as well as themselves and acting with tolerance and maturity when other pupils have personal difficulties. The shared celebrations in assembly and the rewards given in lessons help pupils to reflect on how well everyone is doing and develop their self-esteem. The youngest pupils become increasingly aware of others and learn to follow routines, such as taking turns and collecting cups at snack time. Pupils say they feel very safe because there is always an adult to turn to for help, and they know that they will be listened to. Pupils fully adopt healthy lifestyles and are highly enthusiastic about sport, relishing the opportunity to swim in the pool and to play tag rugby. They are very proud of Bettridge's Healthy Schools award and amazed inspectors by listing the vast range of fruit and vegetables which they enjoy.

The school's specialist status work and its inclusive ethos encourage all pupils to understand how they can contribute positively to their own and the wider community, such as the school council's work on saving energy. The impressive work done to improve the 'pupil voice' is clearly seen in pupils' ability to express views confidently on all aspects of school life, such as in the recent survey on how well the school promotes equality of gender, race and disability. Older pupils are prepared well for the next steps in life, participating in individually tailored work experience, mini-enterprise work in liaison with other local special schools, and horticulture and small animal courses at Hartpury College.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers use their excellent understanding of pupils' needs to plan stimulating work, which is well matched to their abilities, yet realistically challenging so that progress improves significantly and pupils enjoy a strong sense of achievement. Teachers use resources and communication strategies very effectively to ensure that all pupils are engaged and motivated. The lack of space in classrooms continues to restrict some methods available for teachers to enhance

teaching and learning, for example greater use of computers. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is outstanding and provides an excellent example for pupils to follow. The classroom atmosphere is calm, with a high level of expectation that pupils will do their best. No time is wasted in the pursuit of excellent progress for all pupils, yet staff are sensitive to pupils' individual needs, making sure that they are comfortable and safe and have the therapeutic programmes they need. The impressive management of challenging behaviour keeps disruption to learning to a minimum. The assessment of pupils' learning on a day-to-day basis is exemplary. The way in which teachers use this information to involve pupils in reviewing their own progress and targets is the key to success in teaching and learning at Bettridge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

High priority is placed on ensuring pupils have the skills required for their future lives, whether as independent adults or in gaining from the support available to them. Through the specialist school work, there is a strong focus on ensuring pupils develop literacy skills and make the most of the wide range of communication strategies available, including switches, signing and using symbols. At the same time, the promotion of pupils' personal development skills is to the fore, helping them to learn how to manage their own behaviour, cope when feeling worried, and to relate to others in the wider community. The emphasis on promoting pupils' social, emotional and physical needs in lessons and through the integration of the skills and expertise of other professionals is exemplary. The good and developing emphasis on work-related learning, vocational studies and basic skills for life prepares Years 10 and 11 pupils extremely well for life after school. Pupils gain tremendous enjoyment of learning through the wide range of enrichment, residential and after-school activities. The summer play scheme demonstrates the commitment of staff to providing continuity of learning and support for parents and carers. The school makes the best use it can of its restricted accommodation so that pupils' learning and personal development are not compromised, but is acutely aware that some aspects of pupils' learning are limited by the lack of facilities, for example practical investigations in science.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The attention given to pupils' well-being and personal development is second to none. Staff know pupils extremely well and go the extra mile in supporting them, their families and carers. Parents' views reflect the close partnership they have with the school, typically commenting, 'The staff at Bettridge go above and beyond the call of duty. It is a caring school and supportive of children and parents and seeks to promote awareness within the wider community.' Strategies for managing behaviour are excellent and make a real difference, so that challenging behaviour is reduced and the need for exclusion is rare. The range and extent of support from outside agencies and therapists is outstanding and readily available because the school leads and manages this aspect of its work extremely well. The school nurse plays an important role in this respect. Child protection and safeguarding procedures, including risk assessments for individual pupils, are firmly established and understood well. Academic guidance is first class. The targets to help pupils improve in their learning are precise and personalised so that they have maximum impact on their individual progress. Older students receive high quality guidance and advice about options for the future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher inspires all leaders and managers to strive at the highest level to bring about continued and further success for the school. Assured confidence, based on high levels of experience, means that there is exemplary practice throughout the school. Staff have the highest expectations for pupils' achievement and eagerly adopt new initiatives, such as the involvement of pupils in reviewing their own targets, with a clear focus on raising achievement to an even higher level. Governors offer invaluable support and expertise, being fully involved in decisions, yet not hesitating to question and challenge. They have been instrumental in ensuring the school gets its much needed new building.

The school's self-evaluation of its performance is accurate, and includes analysis and use of achievement data, clearly focused monitoring of teaching and learning, and reviews of areas for improvement. Opportunities for the continued professional development of staff are outstanding, enabling them to hone their already first-class skills. The school is flourishing because of the excellent shared strategies and vision of staff in using the school's specialism to the full to benefit pupils' achievement and improve awareness of disability in the wider community. The promotion of inclusion and equality for all is a model of excellent practice and as a result, the school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding.

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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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	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	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

4 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bettridge School, Cheltenham, GL51 3AT

Thank you for making the inspectors welcome. You did a super job in helping us to find out all about your school. We really enjoyed our visit.

Your school is outstanding. It makes sure you do your very best in everything you learn.

The teachers give you many interesting activities in the classroom and outside school. You enjoy finding out new things and practising all your skills.

Your behaviour is fantastic. You get on very well with each other and with adults. You are becoming independent young people. You can make decisions and let people know what you think. This will really help you a lot when you are older.

You know that it is important to be healthy. The school council told me about the healthy fruit and vegetables that you enjoy eating. It is great that you all love sport, especially swimming and rugby. You know that exercise is very good for you.

All the adults care about you very much. They make sure you are safe and have all the help you need. The way that they help you to understand your targets is fantastic.

The adults run your school very well. I know you are all excited about having your new building soon. It will be great to have more space and room to learn. I have asked the adults to make sure they use every little bit so that you learn well in everything you do.

I know that you will play your part in 'Building a Better Bettridge'.

Best wishes

Mrs Helen Barter Lead inspector