

# Batchwood School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117674
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326660
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Margaret Goodchild

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	65
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Kerry Pollard
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Keith Putman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 February 2006
<b>School address</b>	Townsend Drive St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 5RP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 868021
<b>Fax number</b>	01727 739075

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is special school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is in line with the national average and no students are at early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very high. Seven students are looked after by the local authority and a small number come from traveller backgrounds. Over half the students join the school during Years 7 to 9, rather than at the beginning of the key stage. Childcare is provided on the school site at Lindees, an after-school club, though this is not managed by the governing body and was inspected separately. The school has the Inclusion Mark, the Sportsmark Award, Healthy School status and it is part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families National Progression Strategies Project.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school where the staff are extremely successful in building trust with students and bringing them to the point where they believe in their ability to achieve. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection and a number of features of its work are outstanding. In particular, the headteacher and senior leaders have established an outstanding ethos where students feel highly valued and want to learn. The management of their behaviour is exceptional so that, despite students' previous history of behavioural difficulties, the school is a calm and orderly place. The vast majority of students are highly motivated and behaviour is outstanding.

Aspects of the way the school cares for its students are extremely good and their understanding of healthy lifestyles, their awareness of how to stay safe and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are all outstanding. Students make a good contribution to the community as a whole, and their positive attitudes have an exceptionally good effect on the school community. Satisfactory procedures have been put in place to encourage students to attend regularly and these work very well with most students. The school has yet to explore all avenues in tackling the small minority of students who do not attend as regularly as they should. Personal development and well-being and provision for care, guidance and support are good overall. Attendance is satisfactory.

The curriculum is good and senior leaders have begun to reorganise it to ensure that learning opportunities are matched fully to the needs of different groups of students. Arrangements in Years 7 to 9 are already working extremely well. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides outstanding opportunities for students to gain academic qualifications and good opportunities for them to develop vocational skills through the school's own provision and links with local colleges. The establishment of individual learning packages, for instance, where a student might combine time at school with extended work placement and training, is at an early stage of development.

Achievement is good and students do exceptionally well in some subjects. Standards are below average overall, although students reach and in some instances exceed the national average in some aspects of their work. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in the progress students make. The school does very well by its most able students and predictions suggest that the GCSE results this year are likely to be its best ever. Teaching is good but there is some variation in the progress students make from one subject to another. In addition, irregular attendance has an adverse effect on the achievement of a small minority of students.

Leadership and management are good, and senior leaders provide outstanding direction to some aspects of the school's work. Self-evaluation is good overall and the school is well placed to improve further. Recent improvements in the analysis of data and tracking mean that leaders are able to draw clear conclusions about what is working well and what needs to be improved. Monitoring and self-evaluation are not always as focused or rigorous as they should be, however, especially in relation to improving teaching.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Tackle the irregular attendance of a small minority of students especially by providing more individualised curriculum packages in Years 10 and 11.

- Increase the rigour of monitoring and self-evaluation to ensure that all teaching is at least good.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Attainment on entry varies somewhat from year to year: in some years, it is below average and in others it is exceptionally low. Many students make outstanding progress and leave with a significant number of qualifications. However, the progress of a small minority of students is reduced by their irregular attendance and last year a small number left with no qualifications. Students who are looked after by the local authority and those from traveller backgrounds make similar progress to their peers. The examination results have shown gradual improvement since the last inspection and the school predicts that nearly half of the current Year 11 should gain eight or nine GCSE grades at A\* to G. A small proportion of students are likely to gain a number of passes at A\* to C. Students make exceptional progress in English, where they produce lengthy pieces of written work and take utmost care in their presentation. They reach and often exceed national expectations in work in two and three dimensions in art and design. They produce highly finished artefacts in design and technology, and imaginative and visually striking work in photography. They also do particularly well in information and communication technology and in some lessons in science and music. The basic skills sessions that have been introduced at the beginning of each day are making a very positive contribution to students' literacy skills, for instance increasing their confidence in reading. Nearly all students go on to further education or employment when they leave.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's central aim is to change the behaviour and attitudes students have when they join Batchwood, and it is highly successful in doing so. Students say that they find school very enjoyable and it is clear that they are eager to do well. There are high levels of participation in sport, students respond very well to the healthy lunch menu and fully observe school rules about snacks, drinks, smoking and drugs. Safe practices are very well established and students are knowledgeable about precautions that they must take, for example, when using sharp tools and power saws in design and technology. Behaviour is outstanding and exclusions are very rare. Most students attend regularly and attendance has improved this year but the overall attendance rate is only satisfactory. Students play an exceptionally positive role in the school community. They get on very well together and older pupils readily support younger ones, for example, coaching them in the basic skills sessions that take place each morning. The school council plays an important role in decision making and students have raised funds for national and international charities. They have fewer opportunities, however, to contribute to the local community. Students make good progress and gain many important skills and qualities which should stand them in good stead in the future.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good overall and ranges in quality from satisfactory to outstanding. Teaching in art and English is exemplary as a result of the teachers' outstanding subject knowledge, their

skill in putting the subject across to students and their very high expectations. There are also significant strengths in teaching in design and technology, information and communication technology, music, physical education and science. Teachers are often skilled in motivating students by making tasks relevant to their interests. They use interactive whiteboards well and teaching assistants make a good contribution to students' learning. Students as a result apply themselves very well, are eager to learn and take real care with their work. In the best teaching, lessons are planned exceptionally well. However, in the minority of lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, lesson planning needs further attention and expectations are not high enough. In these lessons, the pace of learning slackens. Students' attainment is thoroughly tested when they join the school, whether at the beginning of Year 7 or during Years 7 to 9. Their attainment is regularly checked and students have clear individual targets in all subjects.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The range of learning opportunities promotes students' personal development exceptionally well so that they are confident and enthusiastic learners. Students' needs are met well in the development of basic skills, especially in English and information and communication technology. Learning through themes in Year 7 and a new class structure in Years 8 and 9, whereby students learn in mixed age groups according to their prior attainment, are working extremely well. This arrangement forms the foundation for a range of different learning pathways in Years 10 and 11 in the future. At present, the school provides students with outstanding opportunities to take a number of GCSE courses as well as qualifications at a more basic level. Links with local colleges and onsite facilities for health and beauty and music technology, which are used also by other local secondary schools, provide students with good opportunities to develop vocational skills. An excellent enrichment programme includes a range of visits to museums, ancient buildings, theatres and areas of natural beauty, as well as rambling, skiing and fishing. Further work remains to be done to provide increased opportunities for work-related learning and a more extensive programme of work experience, and to bring curriculum planning in all subjects up to the quality of the best.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care is outstanding because of the time and effort that the school invests in making students feel secure and valued. Senior members of staff 'meet and greet' all students at the school entrance every morning to ensure a good start to the day. In addition, a senior member of staff is employed as head of care with a responsibility to form and coordinate essential liaison between the school, parents and many different support agencies. All staff share a commitment to developing close supportive relationships with students and nowhere is this better exemplified than at morning break when staff and students gather together informally to share 'tea and toast'. Safeguarding arrangements comply with requirements and measures are taken to ensure that all groups of students have their personal needs fully met. Careers guidance is exceptionally good and the school brings in volunteer mentors to support individual students, as well as providing opportunities for older students to act as mentors for younger ones. Both systems have a very positive effect on the students. Behaviour is outstanding because any incidents are dealt with sensitively and constructively and underlying emotional issues are addressed. There is a need to monitor attendance more carefully and to adopt more effective measures to tackle the irregular attendance of a small minority of students. Thorough attention is given

to health and safety. Risk assessments are carried out where appropriate and students are made aware of safety precautions, including when using the internet. Students' progress is carefully tracked and they receive good advice about how to improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher is passionate about making provision as good as it can possibly be for the students and, over the last few years, has been extremely successful in transforming the school's ethos. He has also empowered a number of teachers to develop their skills to the utmost. This has led to exemplary teaching in English and art, and very clear strengths in teaching in a number of other subjects. The headteacher's skills and qualities are complemented by a new deputy headteacher who took up post at the beginning of this academic year. She has introduced an outstanding tracking system, which provides the basis for setting highly challenging targets, and she has done a great deal in a short time to strengthen monitoring and the way teachers' performance is managed. Subject leaders contribute to self-evaluation and teaching is observed regularly. The feedback teachers receive is not as clear as it should be, however, in moving on to teaching that is only satisfactory. In all other ways, senior leaders provide outstanding support to the staff, including in the management of behaviour. The school promotes community cohesion well. It is highly inclusive and students feel that they are part of a community. They are made aware of cultural, social and faith issues and global links have been established, for example, through the school funding the purchase of a donkey, chickens and a buffalo for a family in Africa. The school's own evaluation of its provision shows, rightly, that more work needs to be done to develop links with the local community. Governance is good. A number of governors bring valuable professional skills to their role and the governing body is very ably led by the chair of governors. He is seeking to involve governors even more closely in challenging as well as supporting the school.

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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

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	1
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**

6 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Batchwood School, St Albans, AL3 5RP

Thank you for making us feel welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our time with you. Now, I am writing to let you know that we found that Batchwood is a good school and it does some things really well.

Here are some of the best things about your school.

- You produce excellent work in art and photography, and take great care with your written work in English and with your finished products in design and technology.
- The staff are very good at winning your trust and making you feel valued so that you want to learn.
- You have made extremely good progress in controlling your behaviour and behaviour is nearly always excellent.
- The staff care for you exceptionally well and you know there is always someone to talk to if you are worried about anything.

The headteacher and other staff are very keen to make the school even better for you. We want to help them to do this and so we have asked them to:

- make sure everyone attends school regularly
- introduce some learning 'packages' in Years 10 and 11 to motivate those of you who would enjoy spending some of your time working and training as well as coming to school
- look more closely at the school's work and especially make sure that all teaching is at least good.

You can help by coming to school regularly, continuing to work hard and doing your very best.

Yours faithfully

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector