

The Bridge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134030
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	328804
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

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)	138
Sixth form	30
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	11
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Penny Barratt
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	251 Hungerford Road London N7 9LD
Telephone number	020 7619 1000
Fax number	020 7607 5865

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Bridge is a special school for pupils who have a statement of special educational needs related to severe communication and interaction difficulties. In addition, over half are on the autistic spectrum, more than a quarter have severe learning difficulties, and the remainder have profound multiple learning difficulties. Most pupils come from within the borough of Islington. Many travel for extended periods to get to and from the school. A very wide range of ethnic groups is represented, mainly White British, Black Caribbean, Turkish and Black African, Somali and Bangladeshi. Over half the pupils do not have English as their first language at home. There are two classes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school operates in purpose-built accommodation located on two sites, one adjacent to a mainstream primary school and the other within the grounds of a mainstream secondary school. The Islington local authority Outreach Team is based at the school and there is an attached training centre and a professional training and consultancy service. The school has Healthy School Status. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Bridge is an outstanding school. Pupils' achievements are excellent, and are a direct result of outstanding teaching and learning. Staff put a great deal of time and effort into ensuring that pupils' communication and interaction skills are developed in every activity they undertake. The new headteacher has brought strong and determined leadership and management, which have enabled the school to move forward very successfully from the position at the last inspection. Pupils' personal development is excellent because of the support and guidance that all staff give to this aspect of learning. A major factor in the success of the school is the way in which staff challenge pupils to make the right choices in all that they do. The school is held in high regard by pupils and their parents. As one parent commented, 'My daughter has a great time at school. It is a shame it's not seven days a week.'

The headteacher has a very clear vision of how the school should develop. She is ably supported by the senior leadership group and governors. They have established a caring and supportive ethos that contributes strongly to raising pupils' self-esteem and confidence. There are very strong systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the provision so that managers are fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, they have drawn up a comprehensive improvement plan. There are excellent systems to monitor and develop teaching and learning. These are used extremely well to ensure that all staff receive regular training about how to manage the learning of pupils with a very wide range of needs. This ensures that new staff quickly develop the expertise and confidence to slot into the team structure. Across the school, teachers' planning has a clear focus on the needs of individuals, based on the challenging targets that are set for pupils' personal and academic development. Teachers and support staff make it clear to pupils what they need to do to improve in all the subjects they study. The professionalism and commitment of the support staff play a significant part in helping all pupils to achieve their best. The curriculum is excellent, with a wide range of enrichment that includes performing arts, sport and art activities, the drama club, drumming lessons and visits to local theatres. Throughout the school, a very strong emphasis is placed on physical education, which is highly valued by pupils. The school uses information and communication technology (ICT) extremely well to enhance learning. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and most have excellent attitudes to learning. They work extremely well together in a racially harmonious atmosphere.

The headteacher and the leadership group have established a very effective team structure, which gives all staff a real sense of purpose. These are the cornerstones for the excellent relationships that have been built up with external agencies such as the local authority's children's services, the local Primary Care Trust and other schools and colleges. The school's work is highly valued by the local authority and has led to it being responsible for the authority's Outreach Service. These links have been used very well by the school to enhance the professional development of its own staff and extend the range of their experience. Middle managers link extremely effectively with their senior managers to ensure that all staff are clear about what is expected of them and their pupils. Recently, there have been many changes of personnel on the governing body. Consequently, many of the new governors are only just beginning to come to terms with what is expected of them. They support the school well, but are not yet fully effective in acting as a 'critical friend' to check that the school is performing as well as it can. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their safety are robust. The school's work to promote community cohesion is outstanding. It supports parents extremely well in developing the skills they need to help their children, and works very effectively with the wider

community, promoting and enhancing the profile of its pupils. By considerably improving the quality of education seen at the last inspection, the school has clearly demonstrated that it has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The vast majority of students in the sixth form achieve exceptionally well, as a result of excellent teaching and learning. The curriculum and accreditation arrangements are very well matched to the needs of students, so that all are extremely well prepared for life after school. A particularly strong feature of the provision is the way in which students help younger pupils. An outstanding example of this was when older pupils scattered poppies and led the prayer and school song in the Remembrance Day assembly. Through work experience in the community, for example by working in local cafés, students develop skills that will stand them in good stead for the future. At the same time, such opportunities make learning fun. The sixth form is very well managed, with excellent support from the headteacher and the senior leadership group.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school ensures that all staff working in this area quickly develop the skills needed to support the learning of children with a very wide range of needs, particularly those with profound multiple learning difficulties. Consequently, achievement is outstanding because of excellent teaching. The arrangements to introduce young children to the school are very effective. These include home visits, and links with parents and other settings and agencies, prior to entry. They ensure that children settle very quickly and develop the daily routines and independence that are the cornerstones for their future learning. A particular feature of the work of the EYFS is the consistent use of pictorial symbols, signing, and the use of switches to enable children to communicate with others and begin to interact with their environment. The leadership of the EYFS is very effective. Comprehensive assessment systems and tracking have been developed, which fully meet the needs of the new EYFS curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that governors act more effectively as the school's 'critical friend', to be certain that the present very high levels of performance are sustained.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In all areas of the school, the majority of pupils make excellent progress and achieve extremely well. Despite excellent achievement, standards remain exceptionally low because of pupils' very low starting points and their very high levels of learning difficulty. The school has rigorous and robust systems to track pupils' progress across the school. These are used extremely well to show the small but critical steps in pupils' learning and to ensure that activities are very carefully matched to the needs of individuals. Excellent examples of this were seen in a Foundation Stage literacy lesson involving pupils with no verbal communication skills, and in a Key Stage 3/4 physical education session where the rules of football had been skilfully adapted for players with a wide range of needs, including autism. The rigorous and challenging targets that are set for all pupils, relating to both their personal and academic development, provide the school

with a very effective basis for continued improvement. Excellent support is given to developing pupils' communication skills, regardless of whether or not English is their first language, and consequently all pupils make significant gains in this area of their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

All staff respect each pupil's dignity and, consequently, ensure that their personal development is outstanding. All pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school and the majority have good attendance rates. Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is exemplary, because of the consistent application of the behaviour policy by staff and the excellent role models that they provide. Pupils are very aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and all of them take full advantage of the sports clubs that are available. These good habits are endorsed fully in lessons. Many of the older pupils make a difference to their school community by acting as mentors and advocates for younger pupils. In all their activities, pupils pay particular attention to acting safely. They feel safe and secure, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent. A particularly sobering moment was the reverence which all pupils showed when observing a two-minute silence during the Remembrance Day assembly. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to develop work-based skills through the regular work placements for older learners. The school rock band, which performs at public events and writes some of its own music, is an excellent example of how successful the school is in helping its pupils to successfully challenge and address their individual difficulties.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Through a very focused programme of training, all staff are able to gain the skills and confidence they need to address the extremely wide range and diversity of pupils' needs. Speech therapists work very closely with staff to ensure that all pupils gain the communication and interaction skills that are critical to their development. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly with a clear focus on the needs of individuals and how these will be met. They give comprehensive guidance to their teaching assistants so that lessons proceed smoothly. This seamless pattern of support in lessons ensures that pupils quickly develop the self-esteem and confidence they need in order to succeed. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils are the bedrock for the very successful learning that results. Regular and rigorous assessment by staff, linked to very effective self- and peer-assessment with older pupils, ensures that all pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Since the last inspection, all areas of the curriculum have been considerably improved. Across the school, there are excellent opportunities for all pupils to develop the skills they will need in the future. A very wide range of accreditation is available, enhanced very effectively by opportunities at the local colleges and through work experience and placements. By making extremely good use of real-life experiences, particularly in the local community, the curriculum provides unique and seamless opportunities for all pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and make a significant impact on pupils' excellent personal and academic development. Central to the school's success are the commitment and time that all staff devote to the personal mentoring of pupils. The school provides a safe and secure environment that enables pupils to face the challenges of school life successfully. It is a very harmonious community with little or no bullying and there have been no exclusions. Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. A particular feature of this area of the school's work is how quickly all newcomers across the school settle into routines, which are crucial to their future success. The excellent support that all staff give to helping pupils ensures that they always meet, and very often exceed, the targets set in their personal education plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and vision of the headteacher are outstanding and are central to ensuring that the school has continued to improve on the standards seen at the last inspection. The stability in the senior leadership group, linked to the energy and enthusiasm it generates, ensures that the school continues to improve rapidly. This is particularly noticeable in successful transfer to the new buildings, which have enhanced pupils' experience and stimulated their learning. Governors play an active part in the life of the school but, because so many are new to their role, they still have some way to go before they are acting as an effective 'critical friend'. The effort and resources that the school has invested in developing the skills of staff have paid dividends in ensuring that all have the confidence needed to work successfully with pupils who have a very wide range of needs. Consequently, the school is extremely successful in teaching pupils with autism and profound learning difficulties, at times in the same group.

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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	

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	
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	2	
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

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?	1	1
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	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

25 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Bridge School, London, N7 9LD

Thank you for the help that you gave me when I came to inspect your school. I enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. I was very pleased to be invited to a talk with a group of primary pupils. Your behaviour is excellent and I know that you like coming to school very much. You also like to keep healthy by playing games with your friends and relaxing in the Yoga sessions in class. You told me that all the staff will help you and that you like your lessons. I was particularly impressed with the success of the school rock band.

All of the staff are working very hard to help you learn as much as you can. The Bridge School is excellent and I have asked the governing body to check that it continues to do as well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Charlton

Lead Inspector