

Bents Green School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107169
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	336821
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	158
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Waters
Headteacher	Mrs A Scott-Jones
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, and held meetings with staff and students. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to students' progress, safeguarding and school improvement. Forty eight parental questionnaires were analysed along with 95 questionnaires returned by students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether students achieve in English as well as they do in other subjects
- whether all groups of students make the progress expected of them
- how well sixth form provision builds upon the previous achievements of students
- cross-curricular links
- what the school does to promote community cohesion.

Information about the school

Bents Green is a school for students with language and communication difficulties, including autism. Nearly all students also have moderate learning difficulties. Students are placed in the school if they are deemed emotionally, socially or behaviourally too vulnerable to thrive in a mainstream setting. Typically for schools of this type, boys significantly outnumber girls. Nearly all students are White British.

In September this year, the school relocated to different premises. It now operates on two sites, one for the main school and another for the sixth form. Plans are in the pipeline for another move when a new school is built.

There is residential provision for 20 students during the course of the week. Most students reside for only one or two nights per week. This provision was suspended shortly before the inspection when problems with the fabric of the building were identified by the school's managers. As a result, the school's residential provision has not been inspected by social care inspectors and there were no students in the residence during the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Excellence is embedded in nearly every aspect of this wonderful school. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the ways in which it is helping their children to secure optimism for the future and independence in adult life. Staff and students share enormous pride in the school, which for the third time in succession has been judged to be 'outstanding' by inspectors. This bears testament to outstanding leadership and management, which has embedded a culture of ambition, success and enjoyment across the whole school. With its drive for sustained improvement, achieved through fine-tuning rather than radical change, the school is exceptionally well placed to maintain its position.

Outstanding teaching results in students thoroughly enjoying learning. As a result, they develop excellent attitudes, work hard and behave exceptionally well. Attendance is among the highest of all secondary schools in Sheffield. Students' achievement is outstanding across the whole of the excellent curriculum. This curriculum extends well beyond the classroom, often into the evening and frequently over weekends and school holidays, thanks to the support of skilled and dedicated staff and the stalwart support of the charity 'Friends of Bent Green'. These out-of-school activities are opened up to children from other schools in the city and make a significant contribution to the whole community. In most respects the school's contribution to furthering community cohesion is outstanding, but there is little discrete planning to show how this can be extended still further, nor identification of how the impact of its efforts are evaluated.

In every respect, the care, guidance and support offered to students are outstanding. Wanting the best for every student lies at the heart of the school's success. Every sentence in the school's statement of aims and every initiative for improvement in the development plan refer to 'students'. A typical comment from parents is that, 'They don't expect the child to fit into the school, they expect the school to fit the child'. It would be hard to find a better definition of this outstanding school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop plans to show how the school can further extend its contribution to community cohesion and include in it the criteria by which it will measure its success
 - Do this through consultation with students, parents and representatives of the local and wider community, to identify the contribution the school can make to the whole community, including through national and international links.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

There is no doubt that students enjoy their learning. They attend whenever they can and show huge enthusiasm in class. Their behaviour is exemplary. Coupled with outstanding teaching this creates an atmosphere of high aspiration in which students achieve outstandingly well. In lessons observed during the inspection, learning and progress were judged to be outstanding in more than a half. Most students enter the school in Year 7 at a level of attainment more usually found among students some five years younger. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, many are able to achieve success in Entry Level accreditation which recognises that they are performing at about Level 2 or 3 of the National Curriculum. Occasionally, higher attaining students gain GCSE passes in the lower range of grades.

In recent years the severity of students' learning and other difficulties has significantly increased. A measure of the school's success is that while this has been happening, standards have not fallen. While attainment in English, especially in writing and comprehension tends to be lower than in science and mathematics, achievement is equally outstanding when taking into account the fact that slow acquisition of literacy skills is one of the defining features of students' recognised learning difficulties. There is no evidence to suggest that any group of students achieves significantly differently to any other. Great care is taken in all lessons to ensure that the needs of the very small minority of girls are met and that they are fully included.

The school recognises that for most parents and students the greatest service that can be done is to help students become more socially adept and independent. In this respect, the school's work is outstanding. A typical comment from students is that, 'I'm looking forward to what the future throws at me'. Students are relaxed because they feel safe. This lends an air of calm in and out of the classroom. Excellent attention is paid to promoting healthy lifestyles. Students' emotional well-being is regarded equally as important as their physical well-being. Students' views are always taken into account and they know this. Many are involved in contributing ideas to ensure that their new school, when it is built, will be well suited to their needs.

During the inspection the school band was involved in rehearsals for an imminent performance at the Royal Albert Hall, where they meet and mix with other students from all walks of life. Competing to play at the National Festival of Music for Youth has become an annual event which broadens their horizons, enhances their self-esteem and contributes enormously to how they can contribute to the community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching of the highest standard prevails. It involves all students, irrespective of ability, in a wide range of exciting activities, well matched to their individual targets and learning objectives. Expectations are very high and teachers ensure that all students are equally well challenged to achieve success. Support is adeptly directed to those students who need it most. For some, this is to support their learning, for others, their behavioural and emotional well-being. Teachers are skilled in weaving together different strands of the curriculum. They ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are promoted irrespective of the subject being taught and that the promotion of students' personal, health and social education pervades every lesson. A successful mathematics lesson was characterised by the teacher constantly exhorting students to talk to one another to help them solve problems. The emphasis was as much about promoting communication as about learning fractions.

Classroom staff share a great affinity with students. This contributes to the sense of harmony found in classrooms and to the outstanding level of care, guidance and support offered to students. Typical of this was the sensitive support offered to a student who was troubled by having given what he perceived to be a wrong response to a question. The ensuing support ensured that his dignity was rescued. Excellent use is made of computers to help students learn and make this learning enjoyable. In an outstanding geography lesson, students were enthused as they used a well known website to look at aerial photographs of their homes and other familiar features of the locality. Teachers take great care to check that what they teach is being remembered by students and contributing to their learning. In a mathematics lesson the benefits of this were seen

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when the teacher encouraged students to say if they were finding the work too easy and quickly moved some on to harder work. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of initiatives, carefully tailored to the needs of different groups. Systematic identification of individual needs feeds into the drafting of individual support plans and from there into consultation clinics which involve intricate and extremely effective work with many other agencies and professionals, the purpose of which is to identify any need for external support. Once identified, this support is given, for instance, through targeted support for reading, writing and spelling and a scheme of art therapy to support communication and emotional development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Outstandingly effective leadership and management have been the cornerstone of the school's success over a long period of time. The school has been judged to be outstanding on each of its last three inspections yet not one shred of complacency is evident. While the school receives many plaudits, the focus of its work rests entirely with promoting the education and well-being of students. Leadership and management are exemplary at all levels. This is because all staff are proud to work in this school and share a similar dedication to putting students' needs before their own. The governing body is very influential. They are rigorous in their duties and play a full part in seeking and reporting the views of parents and students. At times they depend too much on information provided by the headteacher and staff rather than being involved in finding out for themselves what goes on in school. The school goes out of its way to involve parents and carers in the work it does and nearly all are highly appreciative of this. Confidence in this is expressed by a typical comment that 'I feel sure that when my son is old enough to leave school they will continue to help him and myself'.

The school systematically forges excellent partnerships with other providers, organisations and services to further the success and lives of students and to prevent them, in the words of one charity worker, 'from falling off a cliff' when they leave school. The school rigorously ensures that equal opportunities are extended to all students. It strongly promotes areas of achievement where its students can compete equally, and often favourably, with those who are less disadvantaged. These include music, where many students excel because of their heightened ability to learn and implement rules and sequences.

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Rigorous attention is paid to the safeguarding of students. Minor administrative omissions do not encroach on the school's drive to ensure that all students are kept safe and well cared for. The school has an excellent understanding of the community it serves and is influential at a local and national level in fostering understanding of language and communication difficulties, including autism. Clearer formal planning for how it intends to build upon this base in order to share its expertise more broadly in the community is needed. Spending is prudent and well planned for. The school gives the community excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Most students have closed in on the limits that their special educational needs and/or disabilities impose on their academic learning by the time they join the sixth form. At this point the focus of their education shifts to their personal development and preparation for adult life. In this, the school excels. While the promotion of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology is in no way diminished, students are given a wealth of support to help them become more independent and ready for future challenges. These include those in the workplace or in other forms of education or training. A very strong student council contributes enormously to the content of the curriculum and how students want provision to develop. All students have the opportunity to experience life in the workplace through short periods of work experience. Students are helped and encouraged to travel independently with the result that most progress from needing guided support to becoming totally independent young people. The successful partnership with others

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results in students being offered a safe and controlled introduction to the adult world. It teaches them how to deal successfully with adult situations and develop the social skills that lead to greater independence.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents wholeheartedly support the school. They report that their children feel safe and happy and are making good progress because they are well taught. Nearly all parents feel that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. Parents are happy that their children are being well prepared for the future and that the school is led and managed effectively. Inspectors agree with the very positive views of parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bents Green School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 158 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	65	7	15	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	77	10	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	67	13	27	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	58	18	38	0	0	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	32	67	14	29	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	56	20	42	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	50	22	46	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	32	67	13	27	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	41	85	6	13	0	0	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	75	10	21	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	65	15	31	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	37	77	9	19	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	79	8	17	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



09 November 2009

Dear Students

It was a pleasure to visit your outstanding school. Thank you for making our visit so enjoyable.

We were extremely impressed by everything that was going on during our visit. It was a joy to see you being so well taught, to see you working so hard and to notice how much you were enjoying your classes. This is why you are making outstanding progress. Your behaviour was excellent. We missed seeing a few of you because you were rehearsing for the concert at the Royal Albert Hall. We hope this goes well.

One of us spent a morning in the sixth form. You know it better as Post-16. Whatever it's called it is mightily impressive and it is clearly achieving great success in helping you to become more independent, sociable and extremely well prepared for adult life.

Thanks to all of you who filled in questionnaires for us. It was good of you to answer them so honestly.

It was a shame not to be able to see you in the residence but I understand that everything should be back to normal soon. Thanks to all of you who spared time to tell us how much you enjoyed your occasional overnight stays.

To achieve the ongoing success so evident at Bents Green takes a lot of hard work. We feel that the people who lead and manage the school so outstandingly well deserve special thanks. Before we left we asked them to keep up the good work and to plan very carefully what more the school can do by working even more closely with other people from different parts of the community.

Good luck for the future

Mr Alastair Younger

Lead inspector

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