

Brook Green Centre for Learning

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113648
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	338212
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Thomas
Headteacher	Cliff Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons and saw 12 teachers. Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff, students, governors, the parent support adviser and a few parents. Inspectors looked at the students' work, school planning documents, the school development plan, minutes from governor's meetings, safeguarding information and assessment and tracking data. They also considered 14 questionnaires filled in and returned by parents and carers.

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

- improvements in teaching since the last inspection
- strategies to improve attendance
- how well students understand the next steps in their learning.

Information about the school

This is a special secondary school for students with moderate learning difficulties and associated behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A few students have additional learning needs, mainly speech and language or autistic spectrum disorders. All students have a statement of special educational needs. Students come from a range of schools on entry. The majority are from special primary schools but a minority join from mainstream schools in Years 8 to 11. The school moved to a new, spacious site at the end of 2008.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. The excellent new accommodation provides a very welcoming learning environment in which students thrive. The school is calm and orderly and students make good progress in their personal development. This is due to the rigorous behaviour management procedures, outstanding personal care and good quality of guidance and support that the school provides. Students take responsibility for their own behaviour. For example, during the inspection two students, who exhibited some challenging behaviour in lessons, later apologised for their outbursts and explained calmly why these behaviours had happened. Students' awareness of how to lead healthy lives is outstanding. They make excellent use of the high quality sporting facilities at the school to keep fit and regularly take part in additional experiences such as kayaking, abseiling and rock climbing. Students make healthy choices at lunchtimes and are fully involved in producing some of the food served. This was evident when salad picked from the students' garden was used as an accompaniment to a meal.

Parents rightly say that their children feel safe and secure at school and the students agree with them. The school fosters excellent moral development. Students genuinely understand right from wrong and value fairness and the contribution of others. Their exceptional behaviour and pride during an assembly, when they received monthly progress and attendance awards, show how much they really value their own successes and the achievements of others. Despite this, and the fact that the majority say they enjoy school, attendance is low. A small minority of students do not come to school regularly enough and attend well below the expected level.

The vast majority of students achieve well. They make good progress during their time at the school. They make the best progress in English because of some excellent planning by teachers. This ensures that students are provided with tasks that fully meet their individual abilities. As a result they are well motivated, enjoy their learning and know what they need to do next to improve. Many also achieve well in mathematics and science, although planning in subjects other than English is variable and does not always match tasks to individual abilities.

Leaders are fully focused on doing the best for the students. They are committed to improvement in all areas and have successfully combined the move to the new school with improving students' achievements. The headteacher has a clear vision and ambition for the future of the school. Many new initiatives have been securely embedded and there are strong partnerships to help move the school forward. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Governors are supportive of the school and through accurate self-evaluation are fully aware of what still requires improvement. These factors mean that the school has a good capacity to continue improving.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance, particularly of the small minority who do not come to school often enough, by working closely with students, parents and support agencies.
- Improve the consistency of lesson planning so that all teachers regularly plan tasks that match the different needs of all groups of students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

'It's worth making the journey,' commented one typical student when asked how he felt about school. This reflects their level of enjoyment and feeling of security in the school. Students' excellent awareness of healthy eating and the need to keep fit and active was shown when high quality demonstrations by the teacher enabled students in Year 8 to improve their physical skills and play collaborative games with enthusiasm. Students value the additional experiences such as the JubileeTen Tors challenge and the many water-based sports activities that are helping students to learn about survival and about their environment. Their good behaviour is evident because of the rare examples of disruption around the school. Most understand the rules and routines well and almost all adhere to them. This is because they value the opinions of staff and want to succeed. They enjoy their new facilities and appreciate the fact that older students have their own separate accommodation. However, they do not all come to school as often as they should. Students are active members of the school council known as 'The Crew'. They look after their environment and recently helped to plan a community day in which members of the public and several businesses were invited to the school to help develop 'growing boxes'. Students are also fully involved in fund raising. They are currently organising a football match in aid of an African charity.

Students improve their academic skills during their time at the school. They achieve well and make good progress in learning. Clear targets help them to focus on their goals and the majority work hard to achieve them. On entry most students are well below expected levels in reading and writing. Because of high quality provision, including some excellent teaching, they almost all do well and improve their skills so that by Year 11 several are successful in their GCSE and Entry Level examinations, while others successfully complete foundation level and vocational courses. Their good progress in English was demonstrated by Year 9 students who were exploring their own feelings of conflict and hatred, as they studied an evocative, visual presentation of the poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen. Students were spellbound by the task and were able to express their feelings confidently and clearly. Excellent teaching meant that students could work at their own level because of clear and accurate expectations of what each would achieve. Students' very good achievements in art are celebrated through some high quality displays of their work around the school. These show clear awareness and understanding of other cultures and styles of expression, as in work done in the style of Picasso on Cubism by students in Year 8 and the ceramic models produced by Year 11 for their recent GCSE examination. Students also achieve well in music, making significant progress because they are encouraged to express their feelings through

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hands-on experiences.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Most teaching is good with strong relationships, well-managed behaviour and effective questioning to extend skills. Students are very complimentary about their teachers. They particularly like practical tasks and visual approaches, which they say 'keeps them interested'. This was evident in several lessons. In Year 8 science, for example, students were keenly engaged in timing how long a ball of plasticine took to drop in a viscous mixture that they had made. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, students worked diligently outside to find different angles in the playground. A small minority say they are 'sometimes bored at school'. The best teaching takes place when tasks are linked carefully to each individual student's ability and interests. This is most effective in English where excellent planning for individuals leads to high quality assessment of their

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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small steps of progress. Assessment is developing appropriately in all subjects. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in assessing, monitoring and supporting in lessons and around the school.

A thematic approach to the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 enables students to use their literacy skills well in other subjects. The use of numeracy and information and communication technology skills is developing. In Years 10 and 11 students work towards a good range of accreditation including GCSEs, foundation learning and/or vocational courses. Enrichment is excellent with many visits to places of interest and high quality residential experiences. For example, a group of students has recently been on a five day trip in which they helped to sail a large sailing ship. Very strong provision for the arts promotes enjoyment. A published programme to improve students' personal, social, health and emotional education is a particular strength and is having a very positive impact on students' behaviour and attitudes. The 'Inclusion Unit' is very effective in supporting and managing those who find it difficult to stay in class.

Excellent care for all groups ensures that there is always someone students can talk to. Staff are proactive in encouraging positive approaches to school and behaviour. Good quality information is provided for students who will be moving on, and effective links with support services such as Connexions mean that students know where they are going. Challenging targets help students to aim high. A parent support advisor works closely with parents and students to ensure that they are well informed about the school. Despite rigorous work, however, procedures to improve attendance are not yet having the required impact.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has successfully managed the move to the new school building and is totally committed to improvement. Clear aims as well as effective and accurate self-evaluation have resulted in improvements in students' achievements, a good team approach, successful changes to the curriculum and improvements in teaching since the last inspection. Partnerships are developing well as, for example, in sports links with other local schools and colleges, and business links which are providing realistic work opportunities for students. Governors are fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have regularly challenged leaders about attendance and the school is working hard with a number of families to try to improve it. Exclusion rates have

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decreased this year and governors are partly funding a parent support advisor who works successfully with students, parents and carers. The school promotes equality well and actively works to eliminate discrimination. It is fully inclusive and staff work very hard to ensure that all students succeed. Provision for community cohesion is effective. There is a clear strategy in place and strong local links are having a positive impact on students' sporting activities and on their preparation for the world of work. Links with schools further afield, as in Ghana, are developing well and are reflected in students' charity fund-raising activities. Safeguarding of students' well-being, including child protection procedures, is rigorous and fully meets current government guidelines. This underpins the extent to which both students and parents feel that the school is a safe and secure environment.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are pleased with the school. Almost all of those who responded to the questionnaire said that the school meets their children's particular needs and prepares them well for their futures. 'I am very impressed with the school. Having moved from the old building with little disruption to the pupils, they settled well and the staff continue to do a good job. It is a happy school and environment to be in,' wrote one parent. Another commented, 'The transition to secondary school was a great worry, however my child has made great progress both in terms of education and interpersonal skills. I am very happy with the school and so is my son.' A very small minority expressed concern that supervision is inadequate. Inspection evidence shows that

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students are well supervised at all times and that safeguarding procedures are rigorous.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at The Brook Green Centre for Learning 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 14 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 88 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	43	7	50	1	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	9	64	3	21	0	0	1	7
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	57	5	36	1	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	57	6	43	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	64	4	29	1	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	64	4	29	1	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	64	4	29	1	7	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)	6	43	8	57	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	71	4	29	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	71	3	21	0	0	1	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	57	5	36	1	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	71	4	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	71	4	29	0	0	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



7 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Brook Green Centre for Learning, Plymouth, PL5 4DZ

Thank you for your help in our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed meeting you. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out during our visit. You attend a good school and listed below are some of its strongest features.

- We really liked your new building and the way that you look after it and keep it clean.
- You behave well in class and in the outdoor areas.
- You make good progress in your lessons.
- You told us that you enjoy school but a few of you do not come to school as often as you could.
- Your teachers plan lots of exciting things for you to do.
- Your work is checked regularly and most of you know how you could do better.
- You know what your targets are.
- You told us that you feel safe at school.
- You work hard to keep fit and healthy. Well done.

We are asking your leaders to do two things to help you do even better.

- To work with you and your parents to help you all come to school every day.
- To make sure that teachers plan tasks that are suitable for all students, including those with different abilities.

Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Denise Morris

Lead Inspector

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