

# Bracken Hill School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122961
<b>Local Authority</b>	Nottinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	340245
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 September –1 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Doris Bell

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>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	93
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Reverend Eric Ashby
<b>Headteacher</b>	cken Hill School
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Chartwell Road Kirkby-in-Ashfield Nottingham
<b>Telephone number</b>	01623 477268
<b>Fax number</b>	01623 477298
<b>Email address</b>	office@brackenhill.notts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including teachers' planning, pupils' books, the school improvement plan, monitoring and evaluation records, assessment records, individual educational plans, minutes of meetings and the termly reports of the school improvement partner. The responses from the pupil and staff questionnaires were analysed, as were the responses from the 23 parents' questionnaires.

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

- individual pupils' progress, and whether teaching and the curriculum, including the use of assessment information, help pupils achieve as well as they possibly can
- pupils' knowledge of how to stay fit, safe and healthy, their attendance, and their understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom
- how well leaders and managers check and improve teaching and learning, especially for more-able pupils and those with autistic spectrum disorders, two of the aspects that the school has been working on.

## Information about the school

All pupils in this small but rapidly growing school have a statement for special educational needs and/or disabilities. The majority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties. A significant minority have severe learning difficulties and a rapidly increasing proportion have autistic spectrum disorders. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is well above average. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school has achieved a number of awards: the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investors in People, Gold Healthy Schools Award, Gold Artsmark, Activemark, Sportsmark, and International School Award. It has also achieved the Financial Management Standard in Schools.

**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. It has several outstanding features, including the extremely high quality care, guidance and support given to pupils and to their parents and carers. Recognising how unique the backgrounds, needs and preferences of each child are, the school fully involves pupils, parents and carers in all that it does. Partnerships with them and with external agencies are excellent, as are those with other schools and providers with whom the pupils engage. Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. The relentless focus on individualised learning includes the effective use of assessment information to plan the next steps to be taken by each pupil. The excellent curriculum, exemplified by its flexibility to meet individual need, contains a wide range of exciting projects and practical activities during and beyond the normal school day that bring learning alive for the pupils.

An extremely happy, supportive learning environment pervades the school and behaviour is excellent. Standards are low because of the nature of pupils' special needs and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, pupils achieve well and leave the school as well prepared as they can be for their future. They make excellent progress in their personal development. All pupils, including those in the sixth form, thoroughly enjoy school. They develop pride in themselves and in their ability to succeed, and contribute particularly well to the school and wider community. As one pupil put it, 'I've achieved things I never thought I could do' because 'the school has taught me about who I am and brings out the best in me.' The vast majority of parents and carers agree with these sentiments, commenting on the 'happy family' atmosphere in which their children learn and play.

Leadership and management are good overall. Recently improved assessment procedures have led to increased challenges in the targets set for the whole school and for individual pupils. However, they have not yet resulted in sharp, measureable success criteria with a clear focus on evaluating learning outcomes in the school improvement plan. Here, as in the lesson observations undertaken by senior staff, the focus is more on teaching than on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. The relatively new heads of learning have a clear remit to do this, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of their work, and they have not yet observed lessons. Nevertheless, excellent teamwork across the school and good improvement since the previous inspection, especially in relation to assessing pupils' individual progress and providing more challenge for more-able pupils, ensure the school's good capacity for further improvement.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

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- Sharpen the success criteria in the school improvement plan to include greater focus on the impact the actions are intended to have on pupil outcomes.
  - Extend the skills of all leaders and managers in evaluating and improving pupils' learning, including through lesson observations.

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

Pupils of all ages, abilities and types of special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. This is evident from the school's data and from pupils' files where teachers' annotations show clearly the rate at which all learners are improving. Some outstanding progress is evident in writing and communication, and signing is used effectively in and around the school to ensure the full participation of all pupils. Most pupils attain external accreditation in a range of subjects and life skills in Year 11 and in the sixth form. More-able pupils succeed in reaching entry or full GCSE levels in subjects such as mathematics, art and design, and design and technology in Year 11. The quality of their art work is particularly good.

The pupils' good attendance, excellent behaviour and willingness to learn contribute greatly to their overall good progress. They describe the school as 'cool', and say that 'the teachers are all helpful'. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and how to deal with any potentially unsafe situations. They report that bullying is rare, although they do occasionally 'get at each other'. They are greatly aware of and very sensitive to the needs of others in school and in the wider community and have a strong moral conscience. They raise funds for charity, look after younger pupils in school and act as volunteer helpers in mainstream schools. They are justifiably very proud of their work in and with the community, and school councillors represent their classmates well in the overall drive to improve the school. Fully aware of the excellent provision for healthy eating and exercise, they explain clearly why these things are important. They particularly enjoy the youth club and the wide range of activities available to them at different times in the year in sport and the arts. Pupils enjoy visits to different places of worship and they successfully learn about different cultures in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. Overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, and pupils are very well prepared for their future.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Improvements in assessment systems mean the school now has a very precise picture of each pupil's overall progress. What pupils learn in lessons arises out of this. Written planning is highly detailed in Key Stages 1 and 2, showing clearly what each pupil is to do. While less detailed in Key Stages 3 and 4, it nevertheless builds effectively on what has gone before and matches activities to pupils' different learning needs well. Although introductions are occasionally a bit long, staff are highly skilled at responding immediately to pupils' responses in lessons to move their learning on. A major strength in teaching is the contribution of the exceedingly skilled teaching assistants to pupils' learning, and the constant interactions between them, the teachers and the pupils. Additionally, relevant staff attend sessions pupils have with, for example, speech or movement therapists, and they use what they learn there to ensure continuity of provision and, where possible, greater progress for the pupils.

The highly flexible and individualised curriculum very closely matches individual needs and enables pupils capable of doing so to reach external accreditation in different subjects, including at GCSE level, in Year 11. It provides a good balance between academic and personal development, including their health, safety and well-being. Basic skills are very successfully fostered alongside a wide range of life skills that prepare them very effectively for their future, such as the ability to work independently and in teams. The school keeps a constant eye on what will benefit the pupils most and adapts the curriculum accordingly. For example, changes in the GCSE syllabus for art and design have rightly enabled it to move towards the full course rather than the short course pupils previously followed in that subject. The excellent range of well attended

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activities at lunchtime and after school also contributes greatly to pupils' learning and personal development.

Highly committed staff know pupils and their parents and carers exceptionally well. The school is keenly aware of the additional vulnerability of its pupils and procedures for ensuring their health, safety and well-being are extremely robust. It goes the extra mile to ensure pupils are eased gently into new situations both when they join the school and when they leave, and also when there are any changes in staffing, or in their personal lives. Parents and carers acknowledge all of this and praise the school highly for the support it gives them, which often extends to after the pupils have officially left.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The excellent direction provided by the headteacher gives the school the drive, vision and ambition to help pupils aspire to making the best possible academic and personal progress. All staff and governors share this vision and, through various working parties, they are fully involved in evaluating the school's progress and contributing to its direction. Leaders and managers regularly consult parents and carers, pupils and external providers and use the feedback effectively to improve the school. Governors provide high levels of support and challenge for the school.

The school's own evaluation of its outcomes is accurate and perceptive. This was evident, too, in the joint observations undertaken with senior staff. The school's priorities are very closely related to the pupils' different special needs and/or disabilities. For example, the increase in the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders led to a focus on autism which has helped staff to understand the difficulties facing autistic pupils and support them even better. At middle management level, heads of learning have a clear role in ensuring improvement but they are relatively new in post and it is too soon to assess their full impact. At present, while there is much in place to ensure continuous improvement in teaching, it is not entirely clear how the school intends to measure the impact of this on pupils' learning. The school works extremely hard to promote community cohesion at all levels. It fully understands its own context and the importance of ensuring pupils understand how they can be a valuable part of the school and local community. It does everything it can to foster in the pupils an understanding of the diversity of culture in the United Kingdom and around the world through, for example, visits and visitors. Overall, it promotes equality of opportunity exceptionally

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well, working very hard to eliminate any sort of discrimination. The school is extremely vigilant in its approach to safeguarding pupils, and it instils in them an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe in and out of school.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make good progress because effective teaching encourages them to build successfully on what they have learned before. Good leadership and management have ensured continuity for the students despite very recent staff changes, and staff new to the school are working very hard to get to know the students as individuals. The astute deployment of teaching assistants, all of whom know the students really well, contributes effectively to all of this and to the students' good progress and excellent personal development. Within the exceptionally well-planned curriculum, a rich variety of activities, on and off-site, keeps students highly motivated. The development of basic skills alongside workplace and personal development skills are at the forefront of all this work, and the same excellent care, guidance and support are as evident here as in the rest of the school. As a result, students successfully learn to deal with different situations in and out of school, and become valuable members of the immediate and wider community. The school is highly successful in helping its students gain places in further education, employment or employment training, and it does everything possible to ease their transition into these new situations. All of this ensures the students leave the school as well prepared as they can be for their future.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## **Views of parents and carers**

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the school's work and the efforts of the staff. Comments such as: 'It is like a loving family,' and: 'The school is very supportive to me and my family,' typify the responses to the questionnaires. A very small number of responses raised concerns about the impact of changes in staffing on the pupils, or a lack of communication with parents. Inspectors found the school is highly aware of the difficulties posed by changes in staff and does everything possible to prepare pupils for them. Also, all evidence in school and that gained from talking to parents during the inspection, shows that communication with parents is excellent, the school often going the extra mile to support them and their children.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bracken Hill 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 statements about the school. The inspection team received 23 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 93 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	61	9	39	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	57	10	43	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	13	57	7	30	2	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	48	8	35	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	16	70	5	22	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	52	9	39	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	48	12	52	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)	9	39	11	48	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	57	9	39	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	57	8	35	0	0	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	48	10	43	0	0	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	17	74	5	22	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	46	18	46	1	3	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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



2 October 2009

Dear Pupils and Students

Bracken Hill School, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire NG17 7HZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you, talking to you about the school, and seeing your work and some of your lessons. Your art work is particularly impressive!

You and your parents and carers are right in thinking you go to a good school. You will remember that you told us that it was 'a cool school' and that all of the staff were very helpful. We agree. We found that the school is well run and that staff are united in their drive to help you make as much progress as you possibly can in every aspect of your learning. The care, guidance and support they give you and your parents and carers are excellent. Your teachers very carefully check your progress in lessons and give you lots of exciting things to do that help you achieve well. It is good to see that almost all of you gain accreditation in a range of subjects in Year 11, sometimes at GCSE, and go on to further education and employment afterwards.

Those responsible for leading and managing the school do a good job. They check how well you are being taught and give teachers good advice on how to improve their teaching. We have asked them to focus more on your learning and to check that the improvements they ask for in teaching really do help you to learn better. We realise that some of the staff are new to their management roles so we have also asked the school to help them understand how to check that you are always making the best possible progress in your learning.

We found you have an excellent understanding of how to keep yourselves safe, fit and healthy. You clearly enjoy the extra things the school puts on for you, for example, the youth club and sports activities. The way you care for each other is excellent and you are right to be proud of the work you do in school and in the community, including when you are on work placements. We think that all of this, alongside your good attendance and your excellent ability to work together or on your own, prepares you very well for when you have to leave the school to go to college or into work. We know the school supports you extremely well in all of this.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours faithfully

Doris Bell  
Lead Inspector

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