



The Brier School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number	103878
LEA	Dudley
Inspection number	277020
Inspection dates	7 December 2005 to 7 December 2005
Reporting inspector	Denise MorrisRISP

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Bromley Lane
School category	Community special		Kingswinford
Age range of pupils	4 to 16		West Midlands DY6 8QN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 816 000
Number on roll	126	Fax number	01384 816 001
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Roger Timmins
Date of previous inspection	29 February 2000	Headteacher	Mr Russell Hinton

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 16	7 December 2005 - 7 December 2005	277020

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Brier School is an all age school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils also have complex difficulties including autism, social or emotional needs. The school was relocated in 2004 to a purpose built site on a large campus alongside two other schools. Pupils come from a wide area of Dudley, and the vast majority arrive by bus or taxi in the mornings. Approximately 10% of pupils are of minority ethnic origin, and about half of these use English as an additional language. There are a very small number of traveller children. All pupils have a statement of educational need. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is higher than average.

The school is involved in a wide range of initiatives to support pupils' learning. The large campus provides many opportunities for pupils to work alongside their mainstream peers. There are regular meetings between staff, governors and pupils of the three schools. The Brier School is currently the focus of a local education authority (LEA) review of special needs provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

The inspection supports the school's view that The Brier School is a good school which provides good value for money. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve well. The youngest children in the reception class enjoy their school life and also achieve well. Opportunities for pupils to share their education with their peers from mainstream schools are outstanding, resulting in a very high proportion of pupils working in a range of settings.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They make good gains in learning about social and moral values, leading to good behaviour in and around the school, and very good attendance. The extent of their cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory and opportunities to further develop these areas are limited. Pupils work safely and have good healthy lifestyles. Their enjoyment in learning is outstanding and is a major strength of the school.

Teaching and learning are good and meet the needs and abilities of all pupils well. Good new assessment procedures have been established but these are not always used as well as they could be in all areas of the school. There is a good curriculum in place and pupils are well cared for. Their well-being is effectively promoted by the whole school community. Links with the wider community and local schools such as 'Campus 21' are good. Pupils develop good work-related skills, particularly in Years 9-11.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The new headteacher is bringing a clear vision and perspective to the school. Leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction and promote high quality care and education. There are effective new procedures in place to enable the school to show how well it is doing. These are not yet being fully used, nor have they had sufficient time to have an impact.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection and is well placed to continue to improve further.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement fully the new strategies for assessing how well pupils achieve, and use these to inform future planning and learning.
- Broaden and enrich opportunities for cultural awareness and spiritual diversity, in order to prepare pupils for life in the modern world.
- Ensure that the new procedures for checking how well the school is doing are used consistently.

Achievement and standards

All pupils, including those with additional needs and those from minority ethnic groups, achieve well. The school sets challenging targets to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding, and overall, pupils make good progress towards these targets. Systems to measure how well they are achieving are now in place, although not yet always used as well as they could be. Pupils across the school achieve good standards in their personal development as well as in their more academic studies. They show confidence and enjoyment in their learning and work hard to succeed. Consequently, they achieve well. Their speaking skills are good and they listen well to others and to their teachers.

On entry to the reception class, children have a wide range of moderate and complex needs, with many requiring help and support in all aspects of their daily lives. They achieve well and make good progress. They continue this good progress as they move through Years 1 and 2, and they achieve well, particularly in their communication and personal skills. By the time pupils reach Year 6, many are confident speakers and listeners, and enjoy showing visitors their well-presented books.

Older pupils in Years 7 to 11 continue to achieve well and make good progress in all aspects of their learning. In 2004, the vast majority of Year 11 pupils achieved a qualification, and they all moved on to further education. 43% of pupils achieved at least one GCSE at grade A*-G. This compares favourably with the national picture for similar schools. Pupils across the school achieved well during the inspection. In a Year 10 class, pupils showed good levels of understanding as they practised filling in a form for an examination entry. Pupils are keen to do well and work hard to present their 'best'.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are good. All staff are committed to ensuring that pupils develop good behaviour, good social skills and clear communication. As a result, pupils settle into the school quickly, responding well to adults, classmates and visitors. Attendance is very good. This is a result of the way pupils really enjoy school life. They show outstanding levels of enthusiasm for learning, and say 'we have fun at school'. They gain increased confidence and self-esteem from the good sporting activities, the wide range of visits and the many clubs run by staff. They develop positive relationships and value friendships.

Pupils learn how to work safely in subjects such as technology, science, physical education (PE) and food technology. They also develop very good awareness of the dangers posed outside school. Even the youngest pupil knows of the need for

gritting roads and paths on a frosty day.

Pupils take advantage of the valuable opportunities to develop a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy exercise and know that eating a balanced diet is good for them. They are well aware of the dangers of substance abuse.

Pupils are able to influence decisions through the flourishing school council, whose members are rightly proud of the contribution they have made to the development of the new adventure playground. This social awareness is further enriched by the opportunities to work, for example, as a teacher's assistant within the school. There are a few examples of pupils celebrating religious festivals such as Divali, Chinese New Year and Christmas, and pupils have had the opportunity to visit a Buddhist Temple. However, there are limited opportunities across the school to experience a wide range of cultures and faiths, extending their knowledge further so that they are fully prepared for the modern world.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good across the school. Teaching is good in the reception class and helps the youngest children in the school to get a good start to their education. They learn in a stimulating environment both inside and outside the classroom. Consequently, they achieve well. In Years 1 to 6, teaching is also good. Pupils enjoy lessons, reporting that 'they are fun'. Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning and are skilled at providing for those who need additional support and guidance. Because of this, pupils of all abilities achieve equally well.

In Years 7 to 11, pupils benefit from good, well-planned teaching. Pupils are confident, keen and enthusiastic learners. They are encouraged to take part, actively enhancing their self-esteem and particularly their social and communication skills. Teachers make good use of the new interactive teaching aids so that pupils have a good visual approach to learning. This successfully keeps them interested and enables them to follow instructions and stay on task.

New procedures have been introduced which will enable the school to know how well pupils are doing. All staff are implementing these, and many have incorporated them into their day-to-day recording and planning very effectively. However, a few staff are still developing their use of the new assessment procedures and await further training.

Overall there has been good improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection.

Grade: 2**Curriculum and other activities**

The curriculum is good. At the Foundation Stage, children quickly develop self-confidence and begin to communicate well with staff, friends and visitors. Across the school, a good, broad and balanced range of activities is offered to all pupils, whatever their age or difficulties. The school offers a range of courses which provide a formal qualification for older pupils. These have recently been extended in light of the more complex needs of the pupils.

The curriculum has a strong emphasis on sport, but also equips pupils well with good social and communication skills. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is strong, although it is not monitored across the school as well as most other subjects. Older pupils receive good opportunities to experience the world of work.

Visits to the theatre and concerts, together with 'fun days' and lunchtime clubs, further enrich pupils' experiences. Nearly one third of pupils have excellent chances to work in local mainstream schools and colleges of further education.

Grade: 2**Care, guidance and support**

The care and support for pupils is good, and in the relationships between adults and pupils it is exemplary. The school has very good child protection policies and procedures. The strong contacts with health and social services ensure the fullest support for pupils and families. Pupils say they feel happy and safe at school, and are able to turn to a supportive adult if a problem arises. The views of pupils are taken into account well and even the younger ones are able to contribute their ideas to their own review of individual education and care plans. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

The school provides a caring environment for pupils and staff alike. Just as additional support for pupils with visual impairment, or those who require therapies, is provided, so too, staff who require training or colleague support for new challenges in the curriculum receive them promptly and effectively.

Grade: 2**Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior staff are good. Leaders work hard to promote a stimulating and varied education for all pupils. This helps them to succeed. The new headteacher has made a good start at the school, and has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. As a

result, the school's self-evaluation is good. Many new initiatives have been planned and are beginning to have a positive impact on all aspects of school life. However, the use of these initiatives has not been checked to ensure that they are being used effectively in all areas of the school to raise standards further. Relationships across the school are positive, and parents are very supportive of the work being undertaken. The deputy headteacher and the senior teacher monitor the daily life of the school thoroughly. They know when pupils are upset, and they ensure that support and help is always available. Teamwork is a key feature of the school's success. The good buddy system, in which teachers support each other to gain particular skills, is having a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils' learning. The roles and responsibilities of subject leaders have improved since the last inspection. The collaborative approach that they use is ensuring that all departments are aware of the curriculum on offer.

The governors support the school well. They know all staff and pupils and they work hard to ensure that the provision is of good quality. They manage the budget carefully and oversee improvements, although they recognise that they could be more involved in school development planning. The school has maintained good standards in recent years and is well placed to continue to improve further.

Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The Brier School Bromley Lane Kingswinford West Midlands DY6 8QN

9 December 2005

Dear Pupils

We would like to thank you very much for your help during the recent inspection of your school. It was very nice to meet you all, and we particularly enjoyed watching your Christmas play practice. We thought you sang well and remembered your words very well.

We enjoyed our day at your school. We found your school to be a good school. We were particularly impressed with your behaviour, which we found to be good, and also with the way you enjoy your lessons. You told us that "lessons are fun" and we agree with you.

You have good teachers and you learn well. There are lots of exciting things for you to do. We particularly enjoyed watching you at lunchtime playing on the new climbing frames that your school council has helped to put in place.

The care that you receive is good and you are well protected and safe. We also found the headteacher to be good.

There are a few things that your school needs to do to improve even further. We think that the school should make sure that your work is checked well in all the classes using the new checking systems. Also that you should have more opportunities to learn about other cultures and faiths. The leaders of your school should make sure that all the teachers check your progress and use the new systems that have been planned.

Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Denise Morris Lead Inspector