

Breakspeare School

Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley, WD5 0BU

Inspection dates 13–14 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress particularly in the important skills of literacy and numeracy.
- Those with speech, language and communication needs make significant strides in developing and improving their communication skills.
- Children attending the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress. This gets them ready for learning and enables them to move successfully on to the next stage of their education.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Older students continue their seamless progression through the school and achieve nationally recognised qualifications. In addition, they improve their independence and social skills, which prepares them well for further education and life beyond the school.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers plan their lessons highly effectively. They make sure the work is hard enough and helps all pupils make the best possible progress towards their individual targets.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent, which is a result of highly effective support from all staff and interesting lessons.
- Pupils say they are happy and feel safe at the school, as well as at West Herts College where older students attend one day per week. This is confirmed by their parents and carers and the school's own records.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and her senior leadership team have made sure there has been a continuing, and very effective, focus on improving further all aspects of the school's work.
- Senior leaders and the experienced governors work together highly successfully to provide pupils with as many opportunities as possible in order to meet the school aims and to give them dignity in their lives.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons, seeing nine teachers. Four of the lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team, and every class was observed.
- A meeting was held with a small group of sixth form students. Meetings were also held with the senior leadership team, others with posts of responsibility, the Chair of the Governing Body, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding, a representative of the local authority and a parent.
- The lead inspector took account of the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school's own records of parents' and carers' and pupils' opinions, as well as the 33 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's practice and looked at a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, data on pupils' progress, documents used by senior leaders to check the school's work, governing body documentation and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.

Inspection team

James Bowden, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mary Geddes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Breakspeare school educates pupils who have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some have additional needs such as visual impairment, hearing or sensory impairment or a physical disability. A minority have complex medical needs, including a few with life threatening medical conditions requiring a minimum of full time one-to-one staff support to meet their needs. A growing proportion of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). All have statements of special educational needs.
- The school is organised into three sections: early years (ages 3 to 7), middle school (ages 7 to 14) and the upper school enterprise department (ages 14 to 19). Numbers vary in each year group, there being no pupils in Year 9.
- Currently, the majority of pupils are boys. There are similar proportions of pupils of White British heritage and minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Pakistani origin. A small minority are from families where English is an additional language and a very few are in local authority care.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium, which provides additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and children from service families, is below the national average.
- Sixth form students attend West Herts College for one day a week to follow nationally recognised qualifications courses.
- The school holds the Department for International Development's Full International Schools Award in recognition of its partnerships with school across the world.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Identify and share particularly excellent practice in teaching and learning to support further all recently appointed staff in becoming outstanding practitioners.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 is low as a result of pupils' complex needs. Attainment remains low in all age groups. However, in relation to their starting points, pupils make excellent progress and achieve highly whatever their abilities.
- High support for all ensures there are no particular differences in the rates of progress made by those with different levels of learning difficulties, boys and girls, those who have English as an additional language or those supported by pupil premium funding. Pupils eligible for free school meals and the few looked after by the local authority achieve as well as others. Very skilled, individual tuition helps these pupils to make significant progress.
- Pupils make excellent progress throughout the school. In 2012, at the end of Year 11, the majority of pupils achieved exceptionally well in English and mathematics, taking into account their starting points. All pupils make excellent progress in improving their communication skills. Some older pupils make excellent progress in learning to read, including using new technologies to enable them to do so.
- After careful checking of the needs and difficulties of children starting in the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff set individual targets for learning and development. The excellent progress children make in all areas of learning and development prepares them well for moving on to the next part of the school.
- On leaving at the end of sixth form, all students are prepared well for the next stage of their education; in 2012, all continuing to Further Education colleges. Students achieved exceptionally well in communication, literacy and numeracy, and gained nationally recognised qualifications in personal development and independence. Their achievement is supported very well by the courses at West Herts College and the weekly opportunity they have to spend a day at the school's own off-site residential house.
- In almost all lessons, progress is outstanding. In an upper school lesson, all excelled in reaching their individual communication targets as well as learning about different physical disabilities and a range of disability aids. In a middle school mathematics lesson on measuring, pupils extended their vocabulary, including the idea of 'long' and 'tall'.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- High quality teaching throughout the school promotes excellent learning for all pupils. In all lessons, they are encouraged to vocalise, touch, point, sign, make gestures and use new technologies. The more able are encouraged to use visual communication cards and, in some instances, hand-held computers, as well as writing down their responses. Improvements in speaking and listening skills are also a focus. Although teaching is never less than good, some of the few recently appointed teachers and other adults who lead lessons occasionally miss opportunities to make their practice outstanding.
- The key strength in teaching is the way in which teachers plan their lessons to enable pupils to make the best progress possible in relation to their individual learning targets. Teachers' careful checking of the progress being made ensures each lesson builds on previous learning. Teachers make sure the tasks provided are hard enough to support pupils' next steps in learning and development. In a lesson to improve pupils' physical development, the apparatus enabled all to

stretch, balance along a low level beam, climb a ladder to a low level platform and step over small hurdles.

- Teaching in English and mathematics is excellent. A wide variety of activities keeps pupils interested and involved and there is a consistent approach by all staff in all lessons to develop and improve the important skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as all round communication skills. In a middle school mathematics lesson, the more able pupils identified different shapes from diagrams displayed on the computer screen and then in photographs of buildings. Pupils with complex speech, language and communication needs recognised the difference between shapes through touching and the use of gestures.
- Teachers are highly skilled in checking how well pupils have learned. In a sixth form lesson focusing on choices, the more able were encouraged to choose a possible career options using a visual prompt worksheet of different jobs. Having read these aloud to the teacher, they then wrote their choices down. Those with more complex needs made choices from a range of visual and tactile resources.
- Almost all parents feel their child is taught well. Pupils say they like their lessons, one commenting, 'Teachers make us learn!'

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school. This is as a result of consistent routines, the staff's high expectations, respect for pupils' dignity and support throughout the day for their well-being and medical needs. Typically, behaviour over time has been outstanding, there having been no permanent exclusions or instances where pupils have not been allowed to go to school for a short period because of poor behaviour.
- Individual behaviour programmes including, where appropriate, individual handling plans, are used to excellent effect. There are no recorded instances of bullying. Most pupils understand what bullying can involve and say it does not happen in this school.
- Smiling faces at the start of the day, positive attitudes throughout and smiling faces at the end of the day are the norm. Pupils are safe and secure and enjoy their learning. Unauthorised absence is very low. In a sixth form lesson, the sheer delight shown by a student was a result of his enjoyment and recognition of the progress he was making.
- Movement around the site is safe and sensible because of high levels of sensitive and appropriate supervision. Particularly well-organised lunchtimes provide opportunities for pupils to be independent or join in group activities. The recent snow, still lying around the site, did not put off the hardy dozen or so pupils who enjoyed supervised play outside. Others, meanwhile, enjoyed the school choir practice.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent because staff interest them with a wide variety of well-chosen activities in lessons. There are opportunities for making choices, working alone or with little support, and for working cooperatively in small groups.
- Without exception, parents and carers who responded to the school's own recent questionnaire agree their children are happy, safe and well looked after. Staff also confirm this view. Almost all pupils who responded to the school's recent questionnaire agreed they like being at school, feel safe and that pupils are friendly to one another. This was also confirmed by the small group of students who met with the lead inspector, confirming also that this was the same at West Herts

College where they are taught alongside mainstream students.

- Right across the school, pupils from a wide range of different backgrounds get on extremely well with one another.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's drive and ambition have led to continuing and sustained improvement. All staff are highly committed and want the best outcomes possible for all pupils. Staff and governors are involved in checking all aspects of the school and in deciding the key areas for improvement. All sections of the school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage and sixth form, are exceptionally well led.
- Senior leaders check carefully the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. They set teachers clear targets to improve further the quality of their work and make recommendations to the governing body regarding additional responsibilities and training. However, they have not identified key aspects of outstanding practice in teaching to share with the few recently appointed staff in order to help them become outstanding practitioners.
- As a result of the school's strong commitment to equality, it ensures there is no discrimination of any kind. All pupils, regardless of circumstances or needs, make outstanding progress in their learning, personal and academic development.
- The subjects and topics pupils study have the same breadth as mainstream schools and, because they are tailored to match fully the abilities and aspirations of individuals, all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. This contributes significantly to their all-round personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Relationships are excellent and pupils enjoy learning about other faiths and festivals. As a result of the school's highly effective links with other schools across the world, pupils' learning about other countries and cultures is extended extremely well.
- The school works highly effectively with other professionals to support pupils' wide ranging learning difficulties and disabilities. It also works closely with parents and carers, which they appreciate. This is evident in their very positive responses to the school's recent survey of their views.
- The local authority knows the school well and offers a light touch, but effective approach to support continuing improvements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the previous inspection, the governing body has increased its effectiveness in holding senior leaders to account for pupils' achievement. It is now much sharper in its role as a critical, yet supportive, friend of the school. As a result of governors' training and visits to check on how well pupils are learning, they have a very clear understanding of the quality of teaching and achievement data. The governing body checks the work of senior leaders and other staff to inform decisions about any actions that need to be taken, training opportunities and pay. It makes sure national requirements are met and safeguarding procedures are fully in place in the school, West Herts College and the school's off-site residential house. The finance committee makes sure the schools finances are in order and diligently oversees the use of pupil premium funding. Current funding is used effectively to ensure pupils with complex needs, including ASD, are prepared well during the lunch break for learning in the afternoon. Extra support staff have been employed to provide very effective individual one-to-

one support for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117681
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	403333

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	17
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vyra Navaratnam
Headteacher	Gill Williamson
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2007
Telephone number	01923 263645
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