

Brannel School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112050
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	357034
Inspection dates	14–15 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	741
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Singleton
Headteacher	Ray Bell
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 33 lessons and saw 31 staff teaching. Meetings were held with groups of students, representatives of the governing body and members of staff. The inspectors evaluated recent examination results and sampled students' work. They looked at a selection of school policies, documents relating to student welfare and safeguarding, the departmental and school development plans and the minutes of the governing body meetings. They analysed 448 parental questionnaires, the staff and student survey returns and the latest results from the school's survey of the views of parents, carers and students.

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

- achievement of students in mathematics and science to determine whether all students are learning well
- quality of the school's work for those who find learning harder or who enter school with below the expected level of attainment
- work of leaders and managers in developing those aspects of the school that were judged good at the last inspection
- impact of the school's specialist status on developing students' understanding of community.

Information about the school

Brannel School is a smaller than average sized rural comprehensive serving a number of villages in the china clay mining district of mid-Cornwall. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds. No students are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average, although there are significant pockets of rural deprivation in the area. The school is a specialist school in English and the performing arts.

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

Brannel School continues to be a popular school and held in high regard by parents, carers and the local community. This is because leaders and managers have a good understanding of the needs of students and are strongly focused on ensuring they have every opportunity to continue their education on leaving school. Decisive action has been taken by leaders and managers to improve the performance of the mathematics and science departments and attainment in both these subjects is now in line with national averages. The rate at which students make progress in English has been a significant strength of the school for many years. The factors that have led to this are well understood by the school leaders and are now much more evident in all subject departments. There is a comprehensive range of strategies in place to provide academic support in lessons and out of school. These strategies are well organised and highly effective, particularly in building up the confidence of lower-attaining students and accelerating their progress. Many of the strong features of teaching and learning seen in the very best lessons are evident in all lessons and, as a consequence, most students enjoy school and achieve well. Teaching in the outstanding lessons is marked by excellent strategies for encouraging students to work together, to challenge their thinking and contribute to discussions that take their learning forwards. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers either lack confidence in these strategies, or do not routinely apply them, so that students fail to develop sufficiently as independent learners.

The opportunities available to the students and their parents or carers through the English and performing arts specialism are impressive. The specialism opens a door to experiences not generally available to students. For example, working with the National Theatre, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Shakespeare Company inspires many to set high aspirations for themselves. Although leaders and managers, along with members of the governing body, are thorough in evaluating the impact of much of their work, this is the one area where they do not check on how well individuals, the school and local community are benefiting from the provision. Students' rising attainment and improvements in teaching and learning, together with the school's clear and accurate awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, demonstrate good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' attainment so that it fully reflects their good progress by ensuring that the effective strategies, used in the best lessons to encourage students to think and learn independently, are extended to all teaching and learning.
- Develop students' understanding and awareness of multi-ethnic communities and cultures in Britain and globally by:

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- increasing the frequency and rigour of evaluations of students' engagement with community groups beyond the school and the immediate community
- measuring the impact of this engagement on students' awareness of other cultures.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enter school with close to average levels of attainment overall, although a majority have below average attainment in literacy. The outcomes of national tests and the work observed in lessons show that students make good progress in English so that their attainment is above average by the time they leave school. Work that is challenging and well matched to students' needs, combined with opportunities to develop spoken language through the performing arts, has a major impact on good progress rates, particularly for the lower attainers and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Achievement in mathematics is better in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 and attainment in mathematics is satisfactory overall. However, there is an upward trend in attainment in mathematics, with some significant improvement in the rate at which lower attainers made progress last year. There is similarly a rapidly improving picture in science. Students' attainment in lessons observed during inspection is good. National test results have been improving after a drop in 2008 and show that all students, including the most able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress overall.

Students enjoy coming to the school. Attendance levels continue to improve and are now above average; the rate of persistent absence and exclusion has fallen dramatically. In part this is because there are so many exciting activities for students to take part in but also because they get involved in shaping the school's future. For example, they acted as consultants for the 'new' school building and became ambassadors for their tutor groups. Students also support charities and work with pupils in primary schools. They are aware of future employment possibilities and the students who talked to inspectors had high aspirations for the future.

Students feel safe and say that staff listen to their concerns and respond to their needs. Students' attitudes towards healthy lifestyles are positive and the large majority take part in after-school sport or dance. However, they are unhappy with the quality of food served in school and eager to 'get this right' when the new building opens.

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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	3
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	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Most of the teaching seen was good and some was outstanding. The features of the outstanding lessons included the step-by-step building of students' skills and frequent reference to students' targets to check their progress. There were plenty of opportunities for students to share their understanding with each other, while lively inputs from the teacher helped capture students' imaginations. In very nearly all lessons work was matched well to the ability of the students and teachers' strong subject knowledge successfully conveyed a love of their subjects. In a few lessons teaching and learning were no more than satisfactory. In these lessons not enough time was given to students to respond to questions and develop their thinking and the range of strategies to engage students was too narrow.

The curriculum has improved since the previous inspection and, by mixing the traditional with the innovative, now ensures that every student has the opportunity to make progress. It is well planned and there is a very good range of accredited courses and links to the local college that allow students to develop their particular talents and follow their interests. A life skills programme is helping to build the confidence and resilience of some lower-attaining students and the school provides a number of memorable experiences, particularly in the performing arts, that capture the interest of all students.

Care, guidance and support are contributing well to an improving picture of attainment across the school. There are excellent levels of care and support for those with special

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educational needs and/or disabilities from a specialised team, while good links with primary schools and post-16 providers allow for a smooth transfer for these students. Target setting and related support are highly effective in some subjects but not in others. As a consequence, not all students know what they need to do to improve.

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?

Senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body are ambitious for the school and work hard to ensure that it maintains its trajectory of improvement. The senior leaders set challenging targets and staff work effectively to achieve them. The school's systems for improving students' attendance, punctuality and behaviour are good and having positive results. Improvements in the quality of teaching have come about as a result of a determined focus on the impact that teaching has upon learning. Tracking systems and the scope of monitoring and professional development are thorough, and as a result more lessons are now good or outstanding.

The school community is both cohesive and harmonious. Strong links with the local and wider community that the school serves are making a good contribution to cohesion. The good partnerships with other schools, external agencies and organisations related to the school's specialist status help to support and improve students' achievements. This is particularly the case for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who have lower levels of attainment in literacy. These partnerships also provide rich experiences for students to work with diverse groups both nationally and internationally. However, the impact of this work on students' understanding of cultural diversity is not systematically evaluated. The promotion of respect and valuing others is at the heart of the school's ethos. The school fulfils all statutory duties in terms of equality and tackling discrimination. Good procedures for safeguarding result in a safe school. The use of resources, particularly those for the specialist status are considered carefully by the governing body and the school, and resources are deployed well to achieve good value for money.

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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

The proportions responding to the questionnaire were well above that typically found in secondary schools. Parents and carers of students joining Year 7 formed the vast majority of those leaving some questions blank. This is not surprising given the timing of the inspection. However, they consistently reported that transition arrangements had worked extremely well. Some 102 parents and carers took the trouble to write to inspectors. The large majority were very positive about the work of the school, particularly noting the quality of the curriculum and the support the school provides their children. A few considered that communication over the recent alterations to the school timetable and curriculum or about matters relating to their child's progress was not good enough. Inspectors discussed this with the school and judged that arrangements have strengthened for keeping parents and carers well informed about all school and student matters. A few raised concerns about bullying in the school. These concerns were brought to the school's attention. Inspectors observed good practice in this area, with students and staff being increasingly vigilant.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Brannel 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 448 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 741 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	159	35	266	59	15	3	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	180	40	247	55	9	2	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	177	40	220	49	14	3	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	143	32	246	55	19	4	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	158	35	247	55	13	3	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	130	29	245	55	35	8	6	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	118	26	270	60	32	7	3	1
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)	147	33	238	53	21	5	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	149	33	241	54	21	5	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	130	29	221	49	43	10	8	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	111	25	250	56	36	8	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	163	36	242	54	12	3	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	203	45	206	46	13	3	1	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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



16 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Brannel School, St Stephen, Cornwall PL26 7RN

On behalf of the inspection team I am writing to tell you about our findings during the inspection. First of all, thank you for talking to us and being so helpful and courteous during our visit. We were very impressed by your behaviour in lessons and around the school.

Brannel School provides you with a good education. You are making good progress during your time at the school. Much of this is due to the good attitudes to learning you are developing but it also reflects the broad and thoughtful curriculum and the good care, guidance and support that staff provide. You attend well because you understand how important it is to get the most out of your time at school and enjoy the friendly atmosphere. We thought the new-style tutor groups give you all a chance to make everyone's time in school a happy experience. You are provided with an excellent range of extension activities like study support, sports clubs, visits and the performing arts programme.

The dedicated leadership of your headteacher is supported by the good leadership and management of others in the school, including the governing body.

We have agreed with your headteacher and staff that they should make two improvements, namely:

- improve opportunities in lessons for you to take charge of your own learning
- check on the benefits of the work you do with communities and groups from outside school so they can build on strengths in this area.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector

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