

Brannel School

Rectory Road, St Stephen, Cornwall, PL26 7RN

Inspection dates

17–18 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- In spite of significant improvements in 2013, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A* to C in some subjects, including science, is below average and is lower than it should be. While the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium is improving relative to national averages, the gap between their achievement and that of other students in the school is not closing quickly enough.
- Although the proportion of students making the expected level of progress is above average, too few exceed this minimum acceptable level. As a result, the proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades is lower than it should be in almost all subjects.
- The pace of learning over time has been too slow, and this remains the case in some lessons. While there is very little misbehaviour in lessons, students are generally passive, and too few show an enthusiasm for learning.
- There are weaknesses in the curriculum that limit some students' access to some subjects. Some lessons are too long, hence students lose interest towards the end. There is too little emphasis on the development of the skills of literacy and numeracy in a range of subjects.
- While senior and middle leaders are enthusiastic and hard working, some lack the breadth of experience needed to make a strong contribution to leadership across the school.

The school has the following strengths

- In the 2013 GCSE examinations students' attainment improved markedly, most notably in mathematics. As a result, the proportion of Year 11 leavers gaining five good passes including English and mathematics improved significantly, to at least the national average.
- Teaching has improved, with tasks better meeting students' needs. Teachers are keen to improve their teaching further. Students who are disabled and those with special educational needs receive good support and make good progress as a result.
- Students' behaviour is good, and they report little bullying and that any which occurs is dealt with effectively. A recent drive to reduce electronic bullying has been effective in raising students' awareness.
- Senior leaders and the governing body have correctly identified the school's weaknesses and have put in place appropriate plans for improvement. Parents and other stakeholders are generally satisfied with the school and recognise recent improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 35 teachers. They reviewed documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- The views of 52 parents who submitted them on the Parent View website, and of 68 staff who completed a questionnaire, were analysed and taken into account. A small number of written and telephone communications with parents were also considered.

Inspection team

Paul Sadler, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Richard Steward	Additional Inspector
Claire Plumb	Additional Inspector
Susan Smith	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average secondary school. It serves part of central Cornwall where, until recently, the main employer was the china clay industry. Education beyond the age of 16 is provided mainly by colleges in St Austell and Truro. St Austell College also provides courses for students in Years 10 and 11; this is the only alternative provision used by the school.
- The school includes an area resource base for students with a wide range of profound special educational needs such as disorders on the autistic spectrum, or physical disabilities. The 12 students come from a wider area and are placed by the local authority but are on the roll of the school.
- The number of students supported through school action is average, as is the proportion who are supported through school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs. Most of these students have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of families in the armed services.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection the school has undergone much change. It was entirely rebuilt, and the new building opened in September 2011. The long-serving headteacher retired in July 2012 and the school was led by an experienced interim headteacher until July 2013 when the present headteacher took up his post. A deputy headteacher retired at that time and was not replaced.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress, especially for those who are capable of high levels of attainment and/or are eligible for the pupil premium by:
 - ensuring that the pace of learning in all lessons is brisk and enables students to make rapid progress
 - ensuring that pupil premium resources are more closely targeted on the individual needs of those students who are eligible
 - setting ambitious targets that raise the aspirations of all students.
 - Increase students' enthusiasm for learning by:
 - ensuring that tasks are varied and motivate students to learn
 - ensuring that the daily programme for each student is sufficiently varied to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm
 - ensuring that each student has access to subjects and courses that enables them to meet their personal needs and interests.
 - Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that middle and senior leaders have opportunities to broaden their knowledge and experience of effective school leadership
 - improving the curriculum, including by ensuring that basic skills such as literacy and numeracy are developed in a wide range of subjects.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In 2011 and 2012 most aspects of the performance of Year 11 students in GCSE examinations were well below national averages. This was recognised by school leaders and governors and effective action was taken, leading to significant improvements in 2013, especially at grade C and above. As a result, the proportion gaining five or more good grades including English and mathematics improved by 18 percentage points to 62%, which is above the 2012 national average.
- Nevertheless, some aspects of students' performance remain weak, mainly because the pace at which they were taught previously was too slow. In science in 2013, nearly half of students failed to gain a grade C or better. Proportions gaining the highest grades, A* and A, remain low in most subjects, exceptions being those such as music, religious studies and Spanish, which are taken by relatively few students.
- In 2013, gaps in the performance of students in receipt of the pupil premium did not narrow when compared with other students in the school, either in terms of their GCSE attainment or the progress they had made. However, their achievement improved at a similar rate to that of other students in the school, so it is very likely that the gaps when their performance is compared with other students nationally will have narrowed.
- In terms of progress over the five years that students are at the school, the proportion making at least the expected progress in English was above average in both 2012 and 2013, and this was also the case in mathematics in 2013. However, the proportions making better than expected progress are below average, which in part explains the low proportions attaining the highest grades of A* and A, as these more able students should have made more rapid progress.
- Students who are disabled or with special educational needs make good progress and attain good results in GCSE and other examinations when compared with their starting points. This is true both for students attached to the area resource base and for those who are not. Other groups of students, such as boys when compared with girls, make equal progress. These facts demonstrate that equality of opportunity is adequately promoted.
- In lessons, most students achieved the tasks they had been set. For example, more able Year 11 students in mathematics successfully investigated the properties of parabolic curves and the quadratic equations from which they are derived. There is evidence, however, that this was not always the case in the recent past and hence in some subjects there are students who are working at a lower level than that of which they are capable.
- Students are competent in reading, writing and numeracy as is shown by their generally good progress in English and mathematics. However, these skills are not sufficiently enhanced by wide reading and problem solving in other subjects. They display good skills when using information and communication technology (ICT) and have increasing abilities to learn effectively in groups or when working independently. These latter skills are being enhanced by the 'opening minds' programme recently introduced into Year 7. This course is a good example of the school's promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 enter GCSE examinations early, mainly in English and mathematics. They then continue to study the subject in order to attain a higher grade, so the practice does not limit their achievement.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The proportion of teaching which requires improvement, while reducing, remains too high. The main weakness concerns the pace of learning. In some lessons the atmosphere is too relaxed and the teachers' expectations of the speed at which a task should be completed are too low. When students are given a timed task, the time is not always adhered to. There is evidence from

discussion with students and from the school's monitoring that this lack of pace was more widespread in the past and is now improving.

- In a few cases of weak teaching, teachers working in subjects such as science which are outside their specialist area lack sufficient knowledge of the subject to enable students to make rapid progress.
- Assessment enables teachers to design tasks that meet students' current needs. Because some students, especially in Years 10 and 11, have made slow progress in the past, tasks are now designed to enable them to quickly catch up. Some more able students are capable of more demanding work. Students generally get good feedback that enables them to improve, but some have been set targets in the past which were undemanding and have limited their aspirations. As with other aspects of teaching, this is changing. For example, some students in Year 10 rightly aspire to grades A* and A, and the quality of their work in mathematics and English shows they are on track to achieve these grades.
- Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive good support from teachers and teaching assistants. For example, such students in Year 7 were seen making good progress in understanding sequencing of numbers and began to understand the concept of negative numbers. There is less evidence that those in receipt of the pupil premium receive support that is adapted as well to meet their needs.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and are keen to improve their teaching. A high proportion responded to the inspectors' questionnaire and all expressed good levels of satisfaction with their job. Teachers were keen to discuss their teaching with inspectors and to learn of aspects which might be improved.
- Teachers make good use of ICT both as a teaching aid and a learning tool for students. Increasingly, they enable students to develop skills of independence and teamwork. They do not always effectively use opportunities to develop students' skills of using literacy and numeracy.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The significant weakness in students' behaviour concerns the lack of enthusiasm for work on the part of some. These students work slowly and become inactive at times, increasingly towards the end of long lessons.
- In general, students' behaviour is good, in both lessons and around the school. They are polite to adults and usually, each other. Inspectors did not observe any examples of poor behaviour affecting the learning of others but students report that this does occur from time to time, often when, as they see it, the needs of the students in the class are too diverse for the teacher to manage.
- Students report that there is little bullying and that when reported to adults it is treated seriously and is acted upon quickly and appropriately. This is another aspect of the school that students see as having improved recently. There has been a recent drive to reduce electronic bullying and students are exceptionally well informed about the nature and dangers of this. This shows the school's keenness to tackle discrimination and promote harmonious relationships.
- Most parents are correctly positive about students' behaviour and the school's response to bullying. A small number of parents of students attached to the area resource base expressed concern about the very challenging behaviour exhibited by a few of these students, due to the nature of their special educational needs. Inspectors investigated and found that the staff had appropriate strategies in place to manage these behaviours and had sought advice from external agencies concerning effective approaches.
- Attendance is below average and senior leaders have identified declining attendance by some students in receipt of the pupil premium. Plans have been put in place to improve attendance, such as by refusal to authorise holidays and family outings. Very early evidence suggests that these plans are having a positive impact.
- Students in Year 10 who attend courses at St Austell College report that they greatly enjoy these courses and that they feel safe at the college.

- Senior leaders are aware of concerns of students and parents about behaviour on buses to and from school and are in discussion with the operator, exploring strategies to improve it.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- During 2012, the governing body and local authority recognised that weak teaching and declining student achievement were placing the school at risk. They acted quickly in appointing an experienced interim headteacher with a brief to improve these aspects of the school. In this he was successful, as is demonstrated by the improved GCSE results in 2013 and the wide-ranging evidence that teaching is also improving.
- The challenge now is to ensure that these improvements continue. In this task, the new headteacher has made a very good start. With the aid of the governing body he has correctly identified the school's key weaknesses and has drawn up appropriate plans to rectify them. The very early signs are that the impact is positive, as is shown by the increasing confidence in his leadership expressed by staff, students and parents. Evidence shows that the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have the capacity to complete the task.
- Senior leaders and managers are enthusiastic and able, but some lack experience of how things are achieved in more successful schools. The current vacancy for a head of science is slowing progress in the development of the subject. Leadership of the area resource base and provision for other students with special educational needs is good, and these students achieve well as a result.
- The current plan for the use of the pupil premium was drawn up before the current headteacher's appointment. While an improvement on the previous version, it lacks sufficient detail concerning the ways in which the widely differing needs of the eligible students will be met.
- The headteacher recognises correctly that the school's curriculum and timetable are significant weaknesses. In Year 9, many subjects have been lumped together under a 'core development' heading which is poorly understood by both students and staff and is causing confusion. The lengthy lessons lead to some students having an inappropriate subject offering, for example studying one subject for well over three hours on the same day. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 lacks flexibility, in part due to the way college courses are organised which, although popular with some, restricts the choices of others.
- Much progress has been made in improving the management of staff performance. The governing body has recently adopted new policies and procedures following consultation with staff, which includes innovative features such as observation of teaching at no notice. A more robust policy concerning the movement of staff to the higher pay scale has been adopted, together with an evidence-based approach to improved opportunities for professional development.
- The local authority has provided good support, especially in recruiting the interim headteacher and improving teaching. Its current view of the school's effectiveness places too much reliance on the recent much improved GCSE results. However, this view is not shared by governors and senior leaders who fully recognise the challenge of sustaining improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body includes a good range of experience, including representatives of local colleges and retired education professionals. It has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and since 2011 has acted in a timely manner to rectify the latter. It has a good understanding of the school's performance, including that of students in receipt of the pupil premium. Governors also have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. They understand how incentives are used to reward good teaching and how underperformance is tackled. The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities such as that to ensure the safety of students. The recent drive to eliminate e-bullying is an example of this. Governors are well trained and have up-to-date knowledge of the school and wider developments.

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	112050
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	426855

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	748
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michaela Harris
Headteacher	Andrew Edmonds
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 September 2010
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