

Billing Brook Special School

Penistone Road, Lumbertubs, Northampton, NN3 8EZ

Inspection dates 17–18 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher is resolute in her drive to make this excellent school even better. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress from their various starting points.
- The headteacher and senior leaders work together very effectively as a team to implement new ideas and strategies. Consequently, the school is getting better and better.
- The sense of leadership and responsibility runs right through the school, and its subject and other middle leaders contribute significantly to the exciting way subjects are taught.
- Communication between the main site and the two satellite provisions is very well organised, so that the whole school operates like a well-oiled machine.
- The governors are knowledgeable and use their first-hand experience from regular school visits to check that senior leaders are doing a first-class job.
- The teaching assistants show their initiative and know exactly what to do to help pupils do their best.
- Behaviour in lessons is exceptional. Pupils are keen to learn and waste no time getting fully involved in the exciting activities teachers prepare for them. Around the school, they are courteous and polite.
- Any difficult behaviour by pupils is managed exceptionally well by staff, so that it does not interrupt the education of others.
- The school has devised its own very effective method of keeping track of any concerns about pupils' welfare so that pupils are kept particularly safe.
- Pupils say they feel very safe and the vast majority of parents agree that their children are very well cared for.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is another outstanding aspect of the school's work. Vibrant and colourful displays along the corridors illustrate the wide range of interesting educational experiences available to pupils.
- Children in early years have a great start to their education because provision is excellent. Pupils with autism spectrum disorder soon settle into the routines that will help them get the best out of their time in school, although they currently have few opportunities to learn through play.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students in the sixth form have a wealth of useful experiences, both in school and at college that prepare them exceptionally well for the future.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 32 lessons across the main site of the school and the two satellite provisions. Many of these were carried out with senior leaders. Inspectors also walked around the school with senior leaders to look at different aspects of the school’s work, as well as listening to pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at work in pupils’ books and files. They held meetings with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, as well as with governors and an external consultant. Two meetings were held with pupils to find out what they thought about their school, and inspectors talked to parents on the telephone.
- Inspectors looked at various documents about the school’s work, including information about pupils’ achievement, behaviour and attendance, as well as policies, minutes of governing body meetings, a summary of the school’s view of its own work, and the school development plan.
- There were 25 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and inspectors also looked at the school’s own questionnaire to parents.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Helen Johns

Additional Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Billing Brook is a large special school.
- Billing Brook School Academy Trust converted to become an academy school in December 2013. When its predecessor school, Billing Brook School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- Billing Brook consists of a main site and two satellite provisions. One is based at Abbeyfield School in Northampton and has 40 places for secondary pupils some of whom are able to be included in mainstream school. The other is at The Grange School in Daventry and caters for 10 primary aged pupils with autism spectrum disorder, some of whom are included in the mainstream school.
- All pupils have statements for special educational need for autism spectrum disorder, severe or moderate learning difficulties or speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Most pupils are White British. The majority are boys.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils (those supported through the pupil premium) is above the national average. Pupil premium funding is received by the school to help those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Give children with autism spectrum disorder more opportunities to develop the skills they need to choose play activities, both inside and outdoors.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is resolute in her pursuit of excellence. Providing a first-class education is at the forefront of everything she does. Everyone is expected to do their best, whether they are a member of staff or a pupil.
- The members of the senior leadership team have an excellent grasp of the day-to-day work of the school at all levels, giving them extensive, first-hand knowledge of how well teachers are doing, and how this affects pupils' progress.
- Senior leaders work very closely with subject and other middle leaders, who have excellent subject knowledge. Middle leaders are very adept at keeping aware of the best ways of teaching their subjects and making sure that teachers use them.
- The early years provision is exceptionally well led and managed. Leaders responded rapidly to the increased admission of children with autism spectrum disorder by putting in place very effective strategies to help these children settle into the school quickly.
- Outstanding leadership of the sixth form that is particularly fine-tuned to students' individual learning needs, means students are exceptionally well prepared for life after they leave school.
- Monitoring of teaching is very thorough because school leaders look at it in a variety of different ways. Their approach is rigorous so that they pinpoint exactly what teachers need to do to make their teaching even better.
- The curriculum is inspiring and it is planned very carefully to make sure it meets the particular learning needs of all pupils, whatever their ability. This is because equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school's work. A recent overhaul of the curriculum for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder has already had an impact by making learning even more accessible for these pupils. Leaders have also done considerable work developing the curriculum to meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum.
- School leaders are at the forefront of thinking of effective ways to assess pupils' achievement, following new requirements nationally, and are working closely with other local special schools and at a national level.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social education permeates through the curriculum, whether pupils are exploring the work of famous artists, experiencing the natural world at first hand or celebrating each other's achievements in assembly.
- Pupils learn about life in modern Britain and are very well prepared for this. For example, a group from one of the satellite provisions visited the Houses of Parliament to find out about the role of democratic government and further their understanding of British heritage.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school. They say that staff listen carefully to any concerns they may have. Leaders and staff regularly check with parents to see if there is anything they can do to improve their work; for example, they responded to parents' requests to receive letters by email.
- The school uses pupil premium funding very effectively to make sure that disadvantaged pupils keep up with their classmates. Primary sports funding has supported lunchtime activities, such as football and Boccia clubs, as well as a sports instructor who has provided opportunities for pupils to join in events with other schools. Year 7 'catch up' funding is equally well used.
- Billing Brook is a highly successful academy school which works in close partnership with the local authority to make sure that the admission process for pupils runs smoothly.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very clear about the way forward for the school and have a wealth of skills and experience in

education and the public sector to help them ask school leaders precise and searching questions.

- Governors spend much time in school and so have first-hand knowledge about pupils' achievement. They are very conscientious in making sure they find out as much as they can about their particular area of responsibility.
- Governors use detailed information from the headteacher to thoroughly check how additional government funding, such as the pupil premium, is being used and how effective it is in raising achievement for disadvantaged pupils. They have a thorough understanding of data about pupils' progress so that they can make sure that all pupils are doing as well as they should.
- Governors understand how teachers' pay is dependent on how well pupils are doing and they are fully involved in setting and reviewing the headteacher's annual targets.
- Governors make sure that pupils are kept safe at school and that all the statutory safeguarding regulations are exceptionally well met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are polite and welcoming. They move around the school with the minimum of fuss. Playtimes are very well supervised social occasions, where pupils happily play together, or enjoy the opportunity just to sit alone and relax.
- Lunchtime in the hall is very well organised, so that pupils with autism spectrum disorder learn to cope with the large space around them and the associated noise. Symbols and photographs are routinely used during lunch and throughout the school day. This helps pupils to understand what is expected of them and to communicate.
- Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour; for example, by earning tokens to exchange for rewards. In one class, pupils with autism spectrum disorder gained points for doing well in different activities to buy items from a healthy tuck shop.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They are very keen to learn, not just because lessons are so interesting, but also because of the excellent relationships between adults and pupils. Transition between activities is smooth, so that time is not wasted. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect throughout the school.
- Some pupils are very aware that there are different groups of pupils in the school. One pupil told an inspector that there were 'the sensible ones and those who struggle with their behaviour'. The pupil also understood that this was because of the other pupils' particular learning needs. This is one of the reasons why Billing Brook is such a harmonious community.
- The school has very effective procedures in place to help improve pupils' behaviour. Staff apply behaviour plans consistently and calmly. The extremely difficult behaviour of some pupils with very complex special educational needs is managed exceptionally well. This is because staff work together highly effectively as a team to help pupils overcome any anxieties that are affecting their behaviour so that they are able to stay focused on their work.
- Exclusions are extremely rare and there were none at all last academic year.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Regular meetings are held to discuss pupils' welfare and there is excellent liaison between the main site and satellite provisions to make sure that all staff are kept regularly informed about issues to do with pupils' welfare.
- The school has devised an excellent computer-based system to make sure that any concerns about pupils' welfare are acted upon and followed up.
- Older pupils understand that bullying can take different forms; for example, it can be because someone's skin is a different colour. They know and understand about keeping safe online because of what they have learnt in school.

- Some younger pupils were not too sure what bullying meant when inspectors asked, but when it was explained, said there was no bullying in school. One pupil said Billing Brook was 'a place of comfort and happiness' and that they felt very safe.
- Pupils are very well supervised in school but are also given the opportunity to do things on their own, such as fetching their own resources or escorting lost inspectors to the right classroom. They know who to ask for help, because pictures of senior leaders with responsibility for child protection are displayed with simple, pupil-friendly instructions on what to do if they are worried about anything.
- The school works exceptionally well with a very wide range of other agencies, both in and out of school, to make sure that pupils have exactly the right sort of medical, social or therapeutic help to keep themselves well, safe and happy.
- Pupils' attendance is higher than other special schools and about the same as mainstream schools. This is because pupils are keen to come to school and attendance is very carefully monitored, so that any issues affecting a pupil's attendance is rapidly addressed.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching over time is outstanding across the school. Teachers are particularly well trained in knowing the right approach to use for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder, both at the main site and at The Grange satellite. For example, teachers use social stories to help pupils make sense of the world around them.
- Teachers plan their lessons very carefully so that they meet the specific learning needs of pupils with both moderate and severe learning difficulties. For example, in one Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson about symmetry, the most-able pupils produced small peg patterns, while those who had less developed hand control made theirs by placing plastic figures either side of a line in the sand. In this way, all pupils were able to achieve their learning targets.
- Teachers set very challenging targets for pupils and they, and school leaders, check pupils' progress very carefully. The cycle of assessment works very well. Teachers make sure that any pupil not doing as well as they should, is picked up quickly and action taken to rectify this. Likewise, if it is felt pupils are reaching their targets too quickly and work needs to be more challenging, teachers set harder targets.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to check how well they are doing in class themselves, by telling the teacher how hard they found the work. They also check how well their classmates are doing when they work together.
- Experienced teaching assistants know pupils exceptionally well and are very effective in helping them to do their best. For example, in another mathematics lesson, pupils rose to the challenge of being asked if they wanted a particularly hard problem to solve, while the teaching assistant skilfully helped them to succeed.
- The teaching of mathematics is particularly strong. This is because leadership of the subject is so effective and there has been a recent whole-school emphasis on developing pupils' mathematical thinking and ability to solve problems.
- Teachers across all key stages and all subjects have excellent subject knowledge. Staff ask pupils questions very effectively to check what they have remembered and to make sure that they have understood what they have been learning. Teachers are always very careful not to give pupils the answers, but instead help them think through problems until they find the solution for themselves. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make sure that they know what they need to do to improve.
- Subject leaders make sure that literacy is particularly well taught across the school so that pupils have plentiful opportunities to improve their writing. For example, in one Key Stage 1 and 2 English lesson, pupils enjoyed using role play to develop an understanding of different characters before writing a sentence about it.

- Information and communication technology is another way pupils are taught how to communicate. In Key Stage 4, pupils learnt how to use an internet search engine to find out about different animals and then used emails to share information effectively with each other. At other times, pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties were observed using switches to make choices or fully participate in activities by being able to answer the teacher's questions alongside their classmates.
- Reading is taught extremely well. Pupils practise reading regularly, and those who are able to learn to link phonics (letters and the sounds they make) so that they can work out how to read unfamiliar words. The importance of learning to read is a consistent thread through teachers' planning, including in the form of using pictures to exchange for objects, symbols or words. Pupils at all levels have the opportunity to practise and improve their reading across the different subjects of the curriculum. In one history lesson, pupils learnt their lines from scripts printed in symbols or words so that everyone had a chance to join in the re-enactment of the English Civil War, whatever their reading ability.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils join the school at different ages and starting points, some having been to other schools previously. The vast majority are working considerably below the levels expected nationally while at school. However, from their starting points, they make exceptional progress over the time they are at Billing Brook.
- Pupils do equally well across all subjects in each key stage and at all three sites, making outstanding progress both academically and in their personal and social development. Occasionally, pupils do even better than usual in one particular subject because that has been a focus for development in the school. For example, progress in mathematics was particularly impressive last year because of the sterling work done in developing the mathematics curriculum to help pupils understand mathematical concepts better. This meant that the vast majority of pupils made exceptionally rapid progress.
- Pupils at The Grange and Abbeyfield sites benefit enormously from the opportunity to learn alongside their peers, and this is reflected in their outstanding achievement, which is in line with the rest of the school.
- Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 get off to a good start so that, by the time they reach Key Stages 3 and 4, they are achieving exceptionally well. The longer they are at the school, the better they do.
- As well as English, mathematics and science, pupils make substantial progress in personal and social development. This is as a result of the heavy emphasis the school puts on helping pupils prepare for everyday life by teaching them the skills they need now and those they will need when they leave Billing Brook.
- Pupils with both severe and moderate learning difficulties are able to leave school with relevant qualifications, such as OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) Life and Living Skills. Senior leaders recently looked for some different qualifications for Key Stage 4 pupils that were harder, so that they could stretch pupils to achieve even better. This is already making a difference to levels of achievement, so that more-able students leave school with City and Guilds, Entry Level or GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects.
- Pupils achieve very well in reading because it is given a high priority. A great deal of thought is put into how to check pupils' progress in traditional reading skills, as well as symbol-supported reading for pupils with autism spectrum disorder or speech, language and communication difficulties, both at the main site and satellite provisions .
- Senior leaders regularly look at how well different groups in the school achieve, such as boys and girls, and find that all groups, including disadvantaged pupils, make equally rapid progress. Because of the very small numbers of disadvantaged pupils in Years 6 and 11 in 2014, it is not possible to report on their attainment without the risk of identifying individual pupils.

The early years provision is outstanding

- Children in the early years are exceptionally well prepared to make the best use of the opportunities available

to them at Billing Brook. They quickly learn their daily routines and children with autism spectrum disorder, in particular, benefit greatly from using schedules to help them understand what is going to happen next.

- The highly effective use of pictures and symbols enables children to begin to communicate with adults and each other. This means that any frustrations they may be feeling gradually lessen over time, so that they start to settle and become ready to learn.
- Relationships between adults and children are excellent. Behaviour is very well managed. Children are motivated to take part in activities by skilled staff who understand children's needs.
- Teaching is outstanding. An excellent range of activities and resources are available, including the all-weather outdoor play area, which allows uninterrupted, safe play throughout the day.
- The early years department is outstandingly well led and managed. Senior leaders regularly check how well teachers are doing and children's achievement.
- Children joining the early years recently have all had autism spectrum disorder and this has changed the dynamics of the class. The department has rightly, and quickly, focused on establishing the structures and routines to help these children learn the skills they need to fully participate in the early years curriculum.
- Senior leaders are working on ways to help children with autism learn how to choose their own activities during free play times, but this work is still at an early stage of development. The children have not yet developed the skills to learn through play.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- Students in the sixth form are exceptionally well taught and make outstanding progress, particularly in their reading and writing skills. Every student is expected to leave school with a qualification matched to their ability, whether it is an ASDAN Award or GCSE.
- Teachers have high expectations of students. In turn, the students respond enthusiastically to the challenges they are set.
- The sixth form is extremely well led and managed. A close eye is kept on the quality of teaching, and achievement is regularly checked. Leaders ensure that students are very aware of how well they are doing.
- Students are particularly well supported by skilled teaching assistants. The excellent relationships between students and staff make a significant contribution to the very positive attitudes students have towards their learning. Students are rightly proud of their school and their position within it.
- Students' behaviour is impeccable, both in and out of lessons. Well-trained staff expertly manage those students who, because of their special educational needs, have difficulties with their behaviour. As a result all students are kept safe.
- The strong sixth form curriculum gives students ample opportunities to practise everyday skills in a variety of different settings. This prepares them exceptionally well for when they leave school. There are widespread opportunities for work experience and practical, relevant courses at school and college. Last year, all students went on to further education or were found places in day care provision.

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.
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School details

Unique reference number	140436
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	450380

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
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	206
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Glen Marriott
Headteacher	Caroline Grant
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01604 773910
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