

Brannel School

Rectory Road, St Stephen, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 7RN

Inspection dates

1–2 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The proportion of students who attain five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C including English and mathematics, is too low. In humanities and language subjects in particular, too few students achieve the grades they are capable of.
- The gap between the progress made by disadvantaged students and other students in the school is still too wide despite the efforts that have been made to support them since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. There is too much variation in the level of expectation that teachers have of students' work.
- Behaviour requires improvement because some students, particularly boys, are inattentive during lessons and this leads to a lack of progress in their learning.
- Too many students are persistently absent from school. These students miss out on learning and so do not achieve well.
- Leadership and management do not ensure that students are prepared well enough for the next stage of their education when they leave Year 11. Too many students do not have high career aspirations as a result.
- Leaders' and managers' efforts to develop the quality of teaching, in particular the teaching of communication skills, have had variable success.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and the community it serves. He has sustained this vision through a challenging period of instability in staffing and put in place a secure foundation for the future.
- The proportion of students who made or exceeded the progress expected of them in GCSE English rose considerably in 2015.
- All students, particularly disabled students and those with special educational needs, are made to feel valued and welcome.
- Students who attend the Area Resource Base are very well cared for and make good progress.
- The school has strong links with local primary schools and these result in effective transition arrangements.
- The governing body has undergone major changes since the last inspection. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body provides highly skilled leadership. Governors provide strong challenge and support to senior leaders.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in all subject areas in order to raise students' achievement and particularly that of disadvantaged students, by:
 - consistently providing work that challenges and interests students in lessons
 - developing the roles of middle leadership in humanities and languages subjects so that actions to improve teaching and raise standards in these subjects are effective
 - making sure that all teachers have the same high expectations of all students no matter which subject or class they are taught in.

- Improve students' behaviour, particularly boys, and reduce the number of students that are persistently absent by:
 - ensuring that middle leaders check that there is a consistent application of the school's policies for behaviour management so that inattentive behaviour is challenged
 - working closely with parents to ensure that they understand the importance of regular attendance at school and the impact this has on achievement.

- Increase the effect of leaders' actions on improving students' communication skills and on raising their career aspirations by:
 - making sure that leaders establish a coordinated and effective approach to teaching communication skills across different subject areas
 - making sure that explicit links are established between the curriculum subjects being taught and inspiring career opportunities as part of a comprehensive careers guidance strategy.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not yet been able to raise the standard of teaching so that it is consistently good or better across all subject areas. While the standard of teaching is improving in English, mathematics and science there are still inconsistencies in other subjects which hinder the progress made by students.
- Not enough has been done by leaders and managers since the last inspection to develop the communication skills of students. Leaders are yet to ensure that a coordinated approach to teaching communication skills across all subject areas is established.
- The actions taken by the school to support disadvantaged students through pupil premium funding have not made enough difference to the progress of those students currently in Year 10 and Year 11. As a result, the gap between disadvantaged students and other students in the school is still too wide. Improvements in teaching, better tracking of students' progress and greater accountability of middle leaders mean that disadvantaged students currently in Year 8 and Year 9 are now making progress which is close to or above that of their peers.
- Middle leaders are not yet effective in ensuring that all teachers follow the school's behaviour policy consistently. As a result, there are still pockets of inattentive behaviour in some areas. Recently appointed middle leaders in English, mathematics and science are taking effective action to improve teaching and raise standards but there is less progress in humanities and languages.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school. He has made staff more accountable for the quality of their work by restructuring the performance management arrangements. Lesson observations take place with no notice and this contributes to a growing 'open-door' culture of professional dialogue and aspiration.
- Well-structured professional development opportunities are provided for staff. For example, many staff have taken the opportunity to learn coaching skills and some are studying for higher professional qualifications.
- The significant changes in staffing at all levels since the last inspection has limited progress towards improving outcomes for students. There is now a stable staff group who are well motivated and committed to develop their practice. Staff questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with the school and its senior leaders. In this questionnaire, most staff who were at the school when the current headteacher joined two years ago, say that the school has improved.
- The curriculum has been restructured over the last two years and some inappropriate qualifications have been removed. It is now balanced and offers students academic and vocational choices at different levels. However, the curriculum does not yet effectively connect students' learning with possible career opportunities.
- The headteacher has built strong links with local primary schools through the 'Mid Cornwall Co-operative Learning Trust'. One example of this is 'The Brannel Challenge', a curriculum initiative which is developing the confidence and social skills of students and bridging the gap between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.
- A wide range of activities are available for students outside of lessons. The school has excellent sporting facilities and staff provide many opportunities for students in a range of sports. The creative arts are well developed. For example, the school theatre, a 200-seat auditorium with professional projection facilities, recently hosted a Royal Shakespeare Company youth production of Henry V. Students have a high regard for the music department, they enjoy the opportunities it provides to play instruments both in and out of lessons. This wide range of experiences promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Year 11 students indicate that ethics lessons, along with assemblies, have helped them to understand the importance of democracy, tolerance and the rule of law in Britain.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The new Chair of the Governing Body is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including variations in the quality of teaching. She is a national leader of governance and has used her skills and experience to strengthen the governing body by recruiting more members and making sure that governors receive appropriate training so that they are able to fulfil their statutory duties. The governors recognise that maximising the impact of pupil premium funding on pupil outcomes is an important area of development for the school.

- The governing body holds the headteacher and senior leaders to account for their actions effectively. For example, by limiting spending where necessary to balance the budget and secure a sustainable financial position. Financial oversight is strong. Performance management procedures are rigorously overseen and a clear link is established between students' achievement and staff pay increases.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding responsibilities are understood and taken seriously by staff at all levels in the school. There is a healthy awareness of risk which contributes to a culture where students feel safe and their parents are confident in the school's ability to provide a safe environment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is improving but it is not yet good because there is still too much variation in the level of expectation that different teachers have between subjects and classes.
- The inattentive behaviour of some students, particularly boys, persists because in some lessons teachers do not provide work which is sufficiently challenging. There is inconsistency in teachers' application of the school's behaviour policy.
- The teaching of communication skills across the school requires improvement because there is not a consistent approach which is understood by all teachers. For example, the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar in lessons is dealt with differently in different subject areas and this leads to confusion for some students.
- Where learning is at its best there is a clear feeling of pace and rigour. For example, in one Year 9 science lesson, students were challenged to debate stem cell research. Passionate discussion about the ethical issues took place, followed by focused consolidation of their learning with writing. In some lessons though, students are not expected to work with the same urgency and so their learning does not progress as quickly.
- Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subjects and the vast majority of lessons are taught by specialist teachers, including in Key Stage 3. The majority of lessons are well planned and structured and as a result the learning activities are generally at the right level to meet students' needs. On several occasions, inspectors saw students being given sufficient time within lessons to deepen and consolidate their understanding before moving on to new material.
- Students are encouraged to develop their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics. For example, in one geography lesson Year 11 students considered critically the use of a graph to display geographical data. This deepened their understanding of different representations of data. Students are also given the opportunity to take part in a regular 'maths challenge' activity in tutor groups and this strengthens their mathematical problem-solving skills.
- Relationships between staff and students are generally good. Many staff are willing to give extra time to students at lunchtime and after school to support clubs or extra learning activities.
- Teachers provide regular feedback to students about their work. The school's policy is to use this feedback to encourage independent learning and resilience. Students are often asked to make judgements about their own work and that of others. They report that this helps them to learn by making them consider what a good piece of work looks like.
- Homework is set regularly in a range of subjects through an online system. Four out of five parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire agree that an appropriate amount of homework is provided by the school.
- Assessment information about individual students is gathered regularly and systematically by senior leaders from a range of sources. This information is used to set challenging targets for students.
- The school is developing an assessment system based on statements of what students should know and understand in each subject area. Students track their own progress through a series of short 'snapshot' assessment tasks. This system is intended to offer parents an online record of their child's learning and progress throughout the year. It is still in the early stages of development.
- A large majority of the parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire think that their child is taught well at Brannel School.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare require improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Students are not confident about their next steps in education, training or employment and some told inspectors that they did not know what they were going to do when they finish Year 11.
- There is a school council and the roles of head boy, head girl and student ambassadors have been re-introduced recently, but there are still not enough opportunities for students to take up positions of leadership responsibility.
- Once in school, students are punctual to their lessons. The majority bring the right books and equipment for each day and are ready to learn at the start of each lesson.
- Students report that teachers step in when any students use offensive language or negative stereotypes towards each other. In one corridor, a floor to ceiling LCD display with an inspirational rolling animation challenges students to reflect on the negative effects of homophobic bullying. This is an example of the inclusive nature of this school.
- Students say they feel safe and well cared for at Brannel School.
- Most parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire agree that their child feels safe at school.
- The very small number of students who are educated off-site at two alternative learning providers are well looked after. Their attendance, welfare and learning are carefully monitored. They are kept safe and make good progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- A minority of boys have a negative attitude to their lessons; they do not fully take part in activities and this causes them to miss out on opportunities to learn.
- The proportion of students who are persistently absent from school is too high. Leaders' and managers' efforts to reduce it have not yet been successful.
- Attendance overall is slightly below average but is improving for both boys and for girls. Staff follow up promptly when students do not arrive at school.
- Behaviour around the site at lunchtime and break is calm and orderly. Students are polite and courteous to each other and this creates a positive atmosphere in the school. For example, when queueing for lunch students are considerate of the needs of other students and staff using the dining facilities.
- The rate of exclusions is well below the national average; serious incidents are rare and are dealt with effectively by senior leaders when they do occur.
- Students respect the school environment. The site is extremely well cared for by the students and so still has the appearance of being brand new. Displays of students' work make corridors and classrooms attractive and inviting. A display of African art in one corridor is a good example of students' work being celebrated in this way.
- Most students take pride in their school and make reference to 'The Brannel Spirit' when talking about it.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- In 2015, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, rose slightly from the previous year. However, this proportion is still well below the national average. While these students entered the school with attainment which was significantly below average, they did not make enough progress to catch up from their low starting points. As a result, outcomes require improvement.
- In humanities and language subjects, not enough students achieve the grades they are capable of. In 2015, attainment in GCSE history and French was below average.
- The gap between the progress of disadvantaged students and other students in the school is too wide. Disadvantaged students in Years 10 and 11 are making less progress than other students in the school in English, mathematics and science. The gap in progress is much smaller in each of these three subjects in Years 8 and 9. In English and science in Year 8, for example, the gap has closed and disadvantaged students are now making better progress than their peers.

- In 2015, the proportion of students making or exceeding the progress expected of them in mathematics between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 was below the national average. The proportion making or exceeding the progress expected of them in English rose considerably from 2014 and was above average.
- The school's information about students currently in Year 11 indicates that overall these students are maintaining their strong progress in English and are now making much better progress in mathematics. Students currently in Year 10 are now making above average progress in both English and mathematics.
- Information about the destinations of students when they leave school indicates that too many of them do not stay in their choice of education or training. Discussions with students currently in school indicate that many are not aware of the possibilities available to them when they leave and do not have a career plan in mind.
- The communication skills of some students, particularly boys, are not well developed. They lack the confidence to express themselves clearly in conversation and in writing.
- Students who start in Year 7 with very low attainment are supported in a small nurture group which provides extra help for their learning in core subjects. This is a new initiative which uses Year 7 catch-up funding. Discussions with support staff indicate that the nurture group is having a positive effect for these students. A programme to accelerate the reading skills of lower-ability students is also having a positive effect.
- The progress made by the most-able students is increasing. In 2015, 7% of students attained five GCSEs at grades A* or A; this is an increase on the previous year. Scrutiny of work and observations of lessons indicate that actions taken to support the most-able students currently in the school are having a positive effect. For example, in one Year 9 mathematics lesson the most-able students could express their mathematical reasoning well when challenged to do so in a variety of contexts, in quick-fire succession.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs currently in the school make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- The Area Resource Base, which caters for students with complex or multiple learning needs or disabilities, currently has 13 students on roll across all year groups. The excellent facilities and highly- trained staff combine to support students to make good progress from a very wide range of starting points. Students attending the Area Resource Base are integrated and accepted into the school very well, attending tutor groups and many mainstream lessons.

School details

Unique reference number	112050
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10001788

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	732
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Berry
Headteacher	Andy Edmonds
Telephone number	01726 822485
Website	www.brannel.com
Email address	enquiries@brannel.cornwall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 September 2013

Information about this school

- The current headteacher joined the school two years ago, three weeks before the last inspection. Since that time there has been a large turnover of staff; approximately one third of the staff have left the school and have been replaced. The Chair of the Governing Body took up her role six months ago and there are several other new governors.
- The school has an Area Resource Base for 11–16-year-old students with severe learning and physical disabilities. Currently, 13 students attend the resource base. These students are placed by the local authority but are on the roll of the school.
- The school uses two alternative learning providers for a very small number of students: Acorn Alternative Provision Academy, Restormel and the Community and Hospital Education Service.
- The school is part of the Mid Cornwall Co-operative Learning Trust, an informal partnership of schools in the China Clay area of Cornwall, near St Austell.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 part-lessons of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed and spoke with students during lessons, before school, at breaktime and at lunchtime. They also met formally with groups of students from Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Inspectors looked at examples of students' work.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, support staff, teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor.
- The lead inspector spoke with an independent adviser who supports the school's development and a representative from Cornwall Local Authority.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents in 68 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Fifty-nine responses to the staff questionnaire, one letter from a parent and the school's own survey of parents and staff were also considered.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, information on students' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, minutes of governing body meetings and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

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Iain Freeland	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Garrett	Ofsted Inspector

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