

Inspection report

Brown's School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 305/6078

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 6 - 7 June 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2005 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Brown's School caters for primary aged pupils with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and social communication difficulties. It opened in 1997 with five pupils and now has 43 pupils on roll, aged between 6 and 12 years. There are considerably more boys than girls. Most pupils are placed here by their parents, but 11 of the 13 pupils with statements are placed at Brown's by their local authorities. The school aims to *'provide a programme of lessons to alleviate literacy and numeracy difficulties; to promote enquiring minds and an eagerness to be involved in the world around them; and to give the opportunity to develop successful learning strategies and acquire essential skills to last for a lifetime.'*

Overall evaluation of the school

The school meets its aims successfully and provides a good quality education. Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching and a varied range of activities that meet their needs effectively. They join the school with low self-esteem and few basic literacy and numeracy skills, but during their time at Brown's they become confident and mature young people who are ready to move to the next stage of their education. Although the school looks after its pupils well, some of its policies and procedures lack rigour and are not in line with the latest regulations for registration. The school is aware of these deficiencies and is making good plans to remedy them.

Quality of education

Curriculum

The broad curriculum enables pupils to learn well and make good progress. It includes all subjects of the national curriculum so that pupils are well-equipped for the next stage of their education. This is often mainstream secondary school. Written planning is variable in different subjects but adequate overall. There is a good emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and planning for these subjects is particularly thorough. Literacy skills are taught in cross-school groups based on pupils' level of skill, and English is taught in year groups to ensure that pupils have age-appropriate texts to study. Pupils' individual needs are carefully considered. Learning targets are derived from their statements of special educational needs and regularly reviewed and revised. Social English lessons, taught by the speech and language therapists, give strong support to provision for personal, social,

health and citizenship education. They contribute significantly to pupils' personal development. Occupational therapy and activities such as yoga and physical activities give good support to pupils' organisation, concentration and spatial awareness which helps them in all aspects of learning. A good range of visits, including an annual residential trip, visitors and activities enhance the curriculum effectively.

Teaching and assessment

Teaching is good and ensures that pupils make good progress. Although lesson planning is satisfactory, there is some variability in the quality. Teachers know what they want pupils to learn, based on a clear knowledge of what pupils already know and understand, but do not always tell them what they will be learning and why. Nor do teachers consistently involve pupils in reviewing their learning to help them assess for themselves what they have achieved. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is highly effective because lessons are tightly structured. Learning is taken along in a step-by-step approach with constant reinforcement of concepts and skills, and using a variety of practical approaches. Teachers consider carefully how the pupils learn best. Every lesson contains opportunities for discussion with the result that pupils develop good speaking and listening skills. Teachers use questions effectively as a means of assessing pupils' understanding and to target individuals with appropriate levels of support. There is also a good emphasis on visual and movement-based learning. Art, which is a strength of the school, is used very well in many curriculum subjects to help pupils learn effectively and as a support to writing. Plenty of judicious praise boosts pupils' self-esteem without being overdone. Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They often use their initiative to intervene at just the right moment.

Pupils' progress and achievement

Pupils make good progress. On admission, they have poor skills in literacy, and often numeracy. This has affected their overall achievement in their previous schools and they have low confidence and self-esteem as a result. Regular assessments of pupils' skills shows that individuals make good progress in reading, spelling and mathematics over time, and that good progress is made between year groups. By the time pupils reach Year 6, most are working at levels expected for their age, with some working at above average levels, particularly in science. Although pupils' speaking and listening skills are particularly good, writing remains a problem for most. Consequently, pupils' written work does not indicate the true extent of their knowledge and understanding which is demonstrated through discussion and practical work. As pupils' basic skills improve, so do their confidence and self-esteem and their achievement in other areas of the curriculum.

Personal development

Pupils' personal development is good and increases steadily throughout their time at Brown's. Older pupils are keen to say how much better they do than at their previous schools because they feel valued and included, and 'this school doesn't

abandon you.' They say that their behaviour improves because they now enjoy learning and are proud of what they can do. Pupils overcome many of their initial difficulties and learn the basic academic and personal skills that will serve them well in later life. They engage in decision-making about themselves and the school community, and are well behaved with good attitudes to work and play. Pupils' concentration and confidence improves as they become older, and the development of their self-esteem is outstanding.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Throughout the school their work shows they are creative and imaginative. Older pupils are particularly reflective. They recognise the impact of their actions on others, and generally support and respect one another, even if they have different views. Pupils have very good relationships with one another and with staff. They distinguish between right and wrong and learn to live according to a range of moral and social codes. Pupils appreciate the school's support in teaching them to manage their own behaviour and think before they act. For example, Year 4 pupils knew very well that being a 'bad sport' and name-calling is hurtful to others. Pupils enjoy taking part in community events, such as sports tournaments and drama performances. They welcome visitors, whether focused on enhancing the curriculum, such as the "Fire Poet" or professional visitors such as inspectors. The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' cultural development. They gain an appreciation of a range of cultures through the curriculum, which celebrates cultural and religious diversity successfully.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Staff show a strong and genuine commitment to the health and welfare of pupils; they know the pupils and their needs well. There is a caring ethos which pupils themselves recognise when they talk of the school as a place where 'you feel you belong'. A range of appropriate policies helps to establish a consistent and positive approach to managing pupils' behaviour and to rewarding their efforts. Pupils work hard to get their 'plus points'. Staff are vigilant and supervise pupils closely. Pupils are helped to develop secure relationships and are taught to overcome their difficulties. Pupils are confident that staff will help sort out any disagreements, if required. As one boy said in response to a question about the school dealing with bullying, 'Brown's does that awesomely!' The school encourages pupils to take part in plenty of sport and physical exercise. It raises their awareness of how to be healthy and safe by making sensible decisions on issues such as smoking, drugs and bullying.

The small size of the school leads to a level of informality in some health, safety and welfare procedures which means that regulations are not met. Systems are too informal and need to be tightened. Some policies, such as the health and safety policy, have been updated recently but are not fully embedded in practice. For example, the school does not carry out and record regular risk assessments on the site, events or activities, including visits. Procedures for recording accidents and for administering medication are not rigorous enough, although pupils are looked after sympathetically when they are hurt or unwell. The child protection policy does not

meet the latest guidance and the staff have not had appropriate up-to-date training in this vital area.

Organisation of the school

The school is managed satisfactorily and generally runs smoothly. The headteacher places a high priority on ensuring that pupils get the support they need to help them make good progress. However, the school does not meet all the regulations for independent schools and some important procedures are not sufficiently robust. Although the school has received copies of checks from their previous employment, some staff have been appointed recently without up-to-date clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The school checks that staff have appropriate qualifications and experience before appointing them but does not check their medical fitness.

The accommodation is well maintained and set in extensive, attractive grounds that are used effectively for pupils' play and learning. Staff display pupils' work, including some unusual 3-dimensional art work, to great effect to enhance the learning environment. Appropriate plans for a new classroom block and modifications to the existing building will further enhance facilities. However, at present, there is no plan to show how the accommodation can be modified to become more accessible for pupils with disabilities.

The school maintains strong links with parents, who are overwhelmingly positive in their praise for its work. Many speak highly of the improvement in their child's progress and self-esteem since joining Brown's. They are kept well informed about their child's progress and receive a good range of information about the school's aims and ethos. The school's complaints policy does not meet requirements because it does not specify clear time frames for dealing with parental complaints. Neither does it allow for a panel to hear a complaint that cannot be resolved by the headteacher. In practice, the school's 'open door' policy works well and queries from parents are dealt with at an informal level.

What the school must do to comply with regulations

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should:

- ensure that staff receive up-to-date training in child protection and prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in compliance with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance; 'Safeguarding Children in Education' (paragraph 3(2)(b));
- implement the written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance (reference HSPV2): 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' (paragraph 3(2)(c));

- fulfil the requirements of DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' by carrying out appropriate risk assessments on activities in school (paragraph 3(4));
- improve procedures for recording accidents and administering medication (paragraph 3(6));
- carry out appropriate checks on staff through the CRB (paragraph 4(b)) and check on their medical fitness before they are appointed to the school (paragraph 4(c))
- ensure that the complaints procedure meets regulations in the following regard: by setting out clear timescales (paragraph 7(c)); providing for the establishment of a hearing (paragraph 7(f)), which parents may attend (paragraph 7(h)), before a panel that includes a person independent of the school (paragraph 7(g)); and for the panel to make its findings and recommendations known to all parties (paragraph 7(i)); and
- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

School details

Name of school:	Brown's School		
DfES Number:	305/6078		
Type of school:	Independent		
Status:	Special		
Date school opened:	September 1997		
Age range of pupils:	6 - 12		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll :	Boys: 35	Girls: 8	Total: 43
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys:10	Girls: 3	Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils):	£12,000 - £16,200		
Address of school:	Cannock House Hawstead Lane Chelsfield Orpington Kent BR6 7PH		
Telephone number:	01689 876816		
Fax number:	01689 827118		
Email address:	info@brownsschool.co.uk		
Headteacher:	Mr M Brown		
Proprietor:	Mr & Mrs M Brown		
Reporting Inspector:	Jane Wotherspoon HMI		
Dates of inspection:	6 - 7 June 2006		

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