

Billing Brook Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122164
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314227
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Karin Heap

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	156
6th form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Deboo
Headteacher	Caroline Grant
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Penistone Road Lumbertubs Northampton NN3 8EZ
Telephone number	01604 773910
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Billing Brook School serves pupils who have a range of complex needs. Over one third have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and all pupils have either severe or moderate learning difficulties. There are a small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and six are looked after. The school has a Foundation Stage and a small post-16 provision for students with ASD. The school received the Healthy Schools and Sportsmark awards in 2007. The current headteacher took up post in September 2006.

A satellite project operates at the Mereway Performing Arts Community College, where 21 pupils are based. The school has several designated ASD classes, two in the primary and four in the secondary school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Billing Brook is a good school with several distinctive strengths, where everyone is committed to teamwork and high expectations. Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong. One parent sums up the school by saying: 'This school meets the needs of the pupils in a spectacular way.'

The strong inclusive ethos, which underpins the exemplary personal development of pupils, is the foundation for everything that goes on in school. Behaviour in and around school is outstanding because pupils receive exceptional care and support. Safeguarding procedures are very strong, with good arrangements to monitor and record health and safety. Pupils are actively involved in their target setting and have the opportunity to contribute to their own assessment and review meetings. Consequently, parents feel they are well informed and supported by the school. The active school council makes a positive contribution to the school; for example, they initiated, planned, developed and raised funds for the two memorial gardens on both sites in memory of pupils and staff.

Due to the nature of the school, the knowledge and skills of pupils on entry are exceptionally low in comparison to the national average. Given their particular and specific needs, however, they achieve well. Pupils make good progress because they are taught well and in the best lessons, they learn independently. Activities are appropriately matched to meet the diverse needs of most learners. Academic and personal guidance is well developed, most notably through the highly effective links with parents in the Foundation Stage. The school has identified the provision for older students with ASD as an area for development and worked hard to bring about the necessary improvements.

The school has strong links and working partnerships with the community and local schools, for example with the Salvation Army to provide pupils with ASD opportunities for work experience. The satellite provision, which is based at the local Mereway Performing Arts Community College, is an example of good and developing practice, giving pupils access to the mainstream curriculum. This project is highly regarded, making a positive contribution to learners at the college. Pupils aged 14 to 19 have access to a wide range of courses, including college links and specific accreditation for qualifications that meets the range of pupil's learning needs. All learners successfully move on to college. The curriculum is well matched to the individual needs of learners. The school has a good variety of enrichment activities and is particularly proud of its two-week summer play scheme. The school has worked hard to develop its use of alternative communication; the use of sign language, however, is not yet fully embedded into everyday practice.

The school is well led and provides good value for money. The headteacher has a very strong and inspiring vision and a firm commitment to bring about school improvement based on effective self-evaluation. There is professional pride shared by all staff, and senior leaders encourage positive teamwork with a firm eye on raising standards. The school deploys very good induction strategies to ensure that all new staff are able to fulfil their roles quickly and effectively. However, middle leaders are not fully involved in the school's monitoring and evaluation processes. Assessment procedures are now established and easy access through an electronic system is currently being developed. Staff use assessment information to inform their teaching and the school is beginning to evaluate its data to further sharpen school

self-evaluation. The work of the governors is good. Overall the school has improved well since the last inspection and is in a strong position to develop further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Because of the very small size of the sixth form, the team only had sufficient evidence to arrive at the key judgements about the sixth form. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Standards are exceptionally low, but students make satisfactory progress relative to their starting points because they follow a curriculum which is adequately tailored to their individual needs. Senior appointments to guide the development of sixth form provision have been made recently. A building programme is planned to support secondary-aged ASD provision for April 2008.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Although knowledge and skills on entry to the Foundation Stage are exceptionally low compared to national averages, children make outstanding progress because they have strong relationships with the staff, who teach them very well. Parents are well supported and make an outstanding contribution to children's learning. Detailed assessments and very good planning ensure children's learning needs are identified quickly. As a result, children learn and develop at a rapid pace. The Foundation Stage class is very well led and managed with a clear commitment to working very closely with parents and other agencies. Consequently, children's assessments are used very effectively to inform their future educational provision. The Foundation Stage is very well resourced and provides exciting and interesting activities, and children develop into very happy and confident young learners.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that middle managers monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and pupils' progress to improve attainment in their subject areas.
- Ensure that the provision for pupils with ASD aged 11 to 19 fully meets their needs so that they can make better progress.
- Further develop the use of signing throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Relative to their starting points, pupils make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. Pupils in the Foundation Stage make outstanding progress and those who have ASD make good progress in the primary department. A very small group of pupils with ASD make slower progress in the secondary department, though they make good overall progress during their time in the school. All pupils leave school with successful placements in education or training, having matured into well-rounded and confident young people. This is because staff and pupils have high and realistic expectations. Pupils with additional needs are fully included and make good progress because staff successfully take into account their individual needs. The setting of challenging targets is good, and effective assessment procedures track the individual progress of pupils. The school now uses this information to analyse the progress made by groups of pupils over time to inform future strategic planning and school development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence

Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school, as is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and attendance. There have been no exclusions from Billing Brook School in the past year and the number of serious incidents is very low. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. There are very good opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual and cultural awareness through assemblies and activities across the curriculum. Promoting social development is a strength, with a particular emphasis on life skills and being healthy. Pupils are able to contribute well to their school community, for example by organising the school's healthy tuck shop. There are very good opportunities for pupils to participate in work experience and to integrate with pupils from other schools, for example from the school's satellite base at Mereway College. This helps to promote pupils' self-esteem and prepare them very well for life outside school. Around the school, pupils act very safely and with respect and consideration for others, and show a very good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle. The school council plays an important part in school development, and this has been recognised through the Active Young Citizenship Award.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence

Teachers and their skilled support staff work in effective partnership to support pupils' learning well. High quality relationships and social harmony are evident throughout the school and underpin pupils' very positive approach to their learning. Teachers have high but realistic expectations and are beginning to use assessment to monitor pupils' progress over time. Planning, however, is thorough and well informed by the knowledge of pupils' individual needs and their previous learning. Most activities are suitably challenging and interesting to effectively engage pupils. In some lessons, however, not all pupils are challenged to ensure they make good progress. A wide range of teaching strategies are used well to ensure that most pupils have an equal chance to participate in lessons. However, the use of sign language is not yet used consistently across the school. Teachers use praise very effectively to reinforce learning and to stimulate and motivate pupils to give their best.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good overall. It is outstanding in the Foundation Stage and satisfactory in the post-16 provision. Provision for literacy and numeracy is well planned and assessment systems are developing well to help ensure that practice is consistent across the school. There is a wide and relevant range of both on-site and off-site enrichment activities, including enterprise activities which help prepare pupils effectively for their working lives. The school is well resourced and exciting activities enable pupils with a complex range of abilities to engage in their learning, for example the interesting variety of creative activities in music and art.

Collaboration with pupils from other schools, for example during drama activities at Mereway College, is valued by all involved. Pupils in the secondary department are often able to take on responsibilities within the school such as 'buddying' younger pupils and maintaining the memorial garden initiated by the school council.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: Insufficient Evidence

Staff are committed to providing the highest quality of care for every pupil, and this is demonstrated by their detailed knowledge of the strengths and needs of individuals. Pupils are fully involved with planning their targets, and participation during annual reviews takes full account of their learning needs, for example through visual communication. Academic guidance is very good in individual education plans and outstanding during verbal feedback in class but is less well developed in written commentary on pupils' work. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety are fully in place and this is reflected in lesson practice, where staff consistently emphasise safety at key points and transitions between activities. Parents are extremely supportive of the school's work with their children and particularly value the progress their children make in their personal and social development. Parents are encouraged to draw upon the school's expertise, and as one parent commented: 'The level of support I have received from them is wonderful'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and her leadership team set a very clear direction and have rapidly brought about necessary school improvement. They have correctly identified areas for improvement, for example that self-evaluation has yet to be fully established into the wider areas of leadership, especially subject leadership. The issue is particularly acute in information and communication technology (ICT), where there is currently no subject leader. The school has taken appropriate and effective action to recruit new staff following recent staff retirements. Recently refined assessment and planning strategies have resulted in many examples of good teaching. Subject leaders are now beginning to use these to track curriculum coverage and pupils' progress in their subjects. Governors offer a range of additional skills to give good support, and make a positive contribution by increasingly challenging the school. The school has strong and continually developing links with other partners and local schools.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	IE ²
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	IE ²

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Billing Brook School, Northampton NN3 8EZ

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our time with you and talking to you about your work. It has been great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and to see how well you behave. You are all very friendly, cheerful and polite and helped us feel at home in your school. Thank you for sharing your work with us.

When we visited your lessons, we were impressed by all the good work that you are doing. We could see that you really enjoy your learning and that you are keen to help each other. One example is the work of your school council to help create your very special memorial garden. We were impressed with the many interesting activities that adults were planning for you and the fun you have.

We are very pleased to tell you that you are lucky to go to such a good school. The headteacher, your teachers and all the other adults who work with you take great care of you and want you to do your best. You are doing very well to learn new things and to become well prepared for when you leave school. You are also doing very well in learning how to work together, helping each other and keeping healthy and safe.

I have asked Mrs Grant to give the teachers who lead subjects more responsibility for ensuring that the teaching and learning in those subjects are as good as possible. I have also asked your school to make sure that all pupils, including older students with ASD, make as much progress as they can. And I have also asked that you will be given the opportunity to use sign language more often. You can help by learning and using sign language with other pupils who need signs so that they understand you better. We will take away many good memories about your school and have really enjoyed the time we have spent with you. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Karin Heap Lead inspector