

The Brooksbank School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107579
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	324600
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Richardson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1644
Sixth form	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Bain
Headteacher	Mrs J Watson
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
School address	Victoria Road Elland West Yorkshire HX5 0QG
Telephone number	01422 374791
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is the largest in Calderdale and is well above the average size nationally. It is situated in Elland but also draws in students from Halifax and a number of semi-rural villages. The community it serves is one of strong contrasts with areas ranging from relative prosperity to severe deprivation. Overall, the school is around the national average for deprivation. The proportion of students who are thought to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as are the proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and whose first language is believed not to be English. While the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average, the proportion of students who have a statement of special educational need is close to the national average. The school is part of a collaborative framework called Campus Calderdale and was awarded specialist status as a Sports College in September 2003 and was re-designated in September 2007. The school has achieved a number of awards for different aspects of its work: Artsmark Gold July 2006; Healthy Schools Award July 2007; Quality standard for Careers Education and Guidance designated 2004 and given the 3 year award in September 2007; Investors in People redesignation in June 2008; Sportsmark 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school is making good provision for its students. There have been clear improvements in the school since the last inspection and standards and achievement are now good. The school's sports specialist status has had a positive impact on a range of aspects. The quality of facilities has improved dramatically as has the range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. While initially focussed on physical education, the importance of developing other subjects and whole-school issues has increased. Improvements in standards and achievement, in teaching and learning and in the curriculum all have links to specialist school status. The increased curricular diversity has provided a broader range of pathways for students from Year 7 to 13 which is better matched to their needs. There are, however, some higher attaining students who are not achieving as well as they might. The school has further developed teaching and learning and has well-developed systems to track and monitor students' progress. Data describing students' performance is well analysed and the school has identified successfully where additional support and development has been needed. Leadership and management has also been a focus for development and middle leaders are accountable to the senior leadership and the governing body for standards in their subject areas.

The school is well led and managed by a senior leadership team that has been in place in its current format for one year. The role of each member of the team is clearly defined and is well understood by the staff of the school. The responses of parents to the inspection questionnaire give strong support for the school. A very large majority believe the school is well led and managed and that their children enjoy school, are well taught, are safe and well cared for. This view agrees with the judgments of the inspection team. Leadership and management provide the school with a good capacity to improve.

There is a consistency of practice, process and understanding of priorities by the middle leadership. It is clear that this development is continuing as the programme is being rolled out to those middle leaders with pastoral responsibilities. Interviews with middle leaders and classroom teachers showed this strength of understanding extended to all levels. Staff describe positively the consultative approach to development and the clarity with which decisions on policies and practices and procedures are communicated. They feel well consulted, listened to and well informed.

The school makes good provision for students' personal development and well-being. Staff know the students and their families well and work very effectively with a range of professionals to provide support for those who are vulnerable. Work with the home school liaison coordinator, and initiatives such as the Focus Centre, homework club and sixth form buddies have a considerable positive impact on students' personal development and well-being. From its analysis of performance data, the school recognises that some students are not participating in extra-curricular activities and not engaging fully in classes. This is limiting the progress they make.

Close monitoring of teaching and learning across all subject areas ensures that successes and areas for development are identified effectively. Students believe they are taught well and they express high levels of respect for their teachers and describe how they in turn are respected. They express high levels of confidence in the care and guidance the school provides. Inspectors also agree with students that teaching and learning are good, a key factor in the improvements in standards and achievement seen since the last inspection. While robust systems are in place

overall for assessment, there are some inconsistencies in assessment practice. For example, not all students receive the feedback they need to improve. Good systems are in place to safeguard and protect all students. Child protection training is rigorous and complies with current requirements. Students receive very good pastoral support.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school makes effective provision for the students in the sixth form. Students are positive about their experience in the school and they particularly value the support they receive from their teachers. They describe the positive impact of the Sports College Status and the 'amazing library'. Students' comments include, 'the staff are very approachable and great listeners. They are always willing to help you'. The school rightly believes that the support systems for individual students are a strength of the sixth form. This, along with good teaching and learning, and a curriculum that is both extensive and appropriate, results in the students achieving well in the subjects they study and in their personal development.

Students in the sixth form are fully involved in the life of the school and welcome the opportunity to support younger students both pastorally and academically. They appreciate the opportunities to work with younger students as mentors and with disabled students as part of their Community Sports Leadership Award. 'You learn not to take everything for granted when you work with disabled people' commented students.

Students make good progress and standards have improved over the past three years to an average level. Attendance is good and retention rates are high. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and there are many recent initiatives that are beginning to have an impact. For example, there are increasingly effective tracking and monitoring systems for identifying students who are underachieving and for whom appropriate support systems are in place. Students feel well supported and that their views are valued.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all students, particularly the higher attaining, are sufficiently challenged to make the best progress possible.
- Develop consistent assessment practice across all subjects so that students receive the feedback they need to improve.
- Encourage those students who are insufficiently engaged to participate fully in classroom and extra-curricular activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most students arrive in Year 7 with average standards. The school's most recent information about the standards reached by students, supported by the progress seen both in lessons and in students' work, indicates that their overall achievement is now good across Years 7 to 11. This represents improvement since the last inspection.

In 2008, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was above the national average. Students attained particularly highly in mathematics, information and communication technology, health and social care and physical education. Nevertheless, due to a lack of challenge in some subjects a small minority of students do not reach the highest grades of which they are capable. Current Year 11 students are attaining

high standards and are making good progress. Students' achievement in the sixth form is good across both Years 12 and 13. They achieve notably well in applied science, art and design and physical education.

In recent years, students have made overall satisfactory progress across Years 7 to 9, reaching broadly average standards in science, above average in mathematics, but below average in English. Changes in staffing and new teaching techniques, with an emphasis on developing important skills through problem-solving and practical activities, have resulted in significant gains. Students now make good progress in all three subjects. Current attainment information indicates that they are on track to reach above average standards by the end of Year 9.

Students who experience difficulties with their learning make good progress because of the appropriately targeted and specialist support. Challenging targets are set and an increasingly high proportion of students meets them. The school is especially successful in reaching and often exceeding, its specialist sports college targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in the good gains in their personal development. Students are thoughtful, conscientious, and mature. Their positive attitudes to school are evident in their above average attendance, in their take up of out of school clubs and in the good quality presentation of their work and its quantity. Comments such as 'It inspires us to give of our best' and 'it's like being a member of a big, happy family' are representative of students' feelings. They say 'teachers put themselves out for us' and are 'ace' and 'imaginative'. Behaviour is good overall and has improved since the last inspection. However, there are a few occasions, particularly when teaching loses pace, students' concentration lapses and their rate of learning slows. The few incidents of inappropriate behaviour rarely disrupt the learning of others.

Students have a good understanding of keeping safe and healthy. There has been an increased take up of the nutritious, high quality food available at lunchtimes in the school. The majority readily participate in a range of sports which not only aids their well-being, but also their social interaction and academic achievement. However, leaders have recognised that a few do not gain maximum benefit from the extensive range of clubs on offer and the school has embarked upon an initiative to involve both the students and their families in activities.

Students are justifiably proud of their charity work, especially the funds raised to provide a science laboratory for their link school in Ghana. They make an outstanding contribution to the school community and to the local area. For example, students who have achieved their Sports Leader qualification have organised local tournaments and festivals and as young ambassadors have given inspirational talks to pupils in primary schools. Students are well prepared for life after school. Many lessons provide opportunities for them to work as part of a team, undertaking different roles and making financial decisions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good across the full age range in the school. Teachers know their students well and approach teaching with enthusiasm. The very good relationship they have

with their students creates a good atmosphere for learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make lessons fun with varied and interesting activities. They ask well chosen questions to check understanding and progress made by students and which also help them to apply what they have learned to different situations. Teachers ensure that students are active and participate in their learning. They share with the students clear success criteria against which the students' progress may be measured. In an outstanding lesson on communication in the new society, health and development diploma, students clearly enjoyed being fully engaged in assessment throughout the lesson.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well so that they make progress equal to that of their peers. Work is usually well planned and appropriate for the full range of students. Nevertheless, in some lessons, students find the work too hard and others find it too easy with not enough challenge. As a result, some higher attaining students do not always achieve as well as they might do. Poor behaviour no longer provides a barrier to learning, as good classroom management and reward systems keep students on task and motivated in almost all lessons. Most students have a good understanding of the level at which they are working and how well they are achieving.

Whilst marking is carried out regularly, it is inconsistent in the degree to which it provides feedback to students to help them to improve their work. Teaching and learning is monitored rigorously and accurately by managers at all levels and effective strategies are put in place to address any underperformance. The recent whole-school focus on improving the quality of teaching has impacted well on improving the students' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good range of subjects in the curriculum and a good variety of activities meets the needs, abilities and interests of all students. As a result most enjoy their lessons and achieve well. There are good curricular pathways for students from Year 7 through to the end of the sixth form. For example, the range of courses at Key Stage 4 has increased since the last inspection and now includes both academic and applied courses. In particular, the provision for vocational studies ensures students progress well, especially those who prefer a less traditional route of education. There is a broader range of applied GCSE and BTEC courses and the school is piloting the Diploma in Society, Health and Development from this September. Further provision for the different needs of students includes entering some of them for qualifications early, which enables them to gain confidence and increase their range of qualifications. The school's specialist sports college status has been used effectively to ensure that all subjects are well supported by cross-curricular project work.

There are good opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond lessons. Learning mentors work particularly well with specific groups of students in English and mathematics. A majority of students enjoy and take full advantage of the vast menu of extra-curricular activities and enhancements to the curriculum, including dance and girls' football. An extensive range of visits and visitors, such as major players from local football and sports clubs, enhance students' experiences. Amongst additional activities are visits to Ghana, France, and Spain. There are very good links with local colleges and businesses which enrich students' experiences and help them to develop good understanding of the world of work. The curriculum and other activities prepare students well for continuing education and training and adult life including work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good with some outstanding features. Productive, positive relationships permeate the school and are in line with the declared ethos of 'aspire and achieve'. Staff know the students very well and respond sensitively to individuals' needs. Effective systems track students' progress in their learning and personal development and, where required, lead to appropriate and detailed individual intervention programmes. As a result, there has been effective support for particular groups of students. Students do not always receive the feedback they need from teachers to enable them to improve their work.

Students and parents benefit enormously from guidance provided by the teachers, pastoral support workers, learning mentors and external agencies. Guidance on careers is an integral part of school life for all students and parents. As a result, there has been a rising trend in numbers remaining in education beyond 16.

In interviews students from all year groups showed high-levels of confidence in and regard for their teachers. In discussions with Year 7 students, they described teachers as 'awesome' and 'fun'. Typically students say they have good relationships with their teachers and that everyone works well together. Parents told us that they were 'impressed by the level of commitment' of staff and a very high proportion agreed that their children felt safe and were well cared for at the school.

Student's self-confidence is well developed, for example, through lessons in personal, social, health and citizenship education where independent thinking, creativity and team work are the focus. The frequency of good quality dialogue between staff and students promotes students' desire to continue to make progress.

The care and support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent and this underpins their overall good achievement. Arrangements for safeguarding students are thorough and meet current requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The clarity and consistency of the leadership and management has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Even where there has been staff turbulence in particular subjects, the appointment of new staff and the effective induction into leadership roles has resulted in undoubted improvements in the achievement of students. Increased rigour and frequency of checks and a sharper focus on the use of data to track students' progress has supported these improvements. The school checks on its own performance well. It analyses data with rigour and challenges heads of department to report on performance four times a year. All staff have received training on observation of lessons and are being trained on how to give effective feedback. The role of middle managers has been a priority for development and has been used during the last school year to build on the established systems of management. The materials used for this training, the 'Leadership Framework', provides a strong basis for professional development.

A powerful summary of the school's ethos is found in its mission statement 'aspire and achieve', and this is seen and heard around school frequently. It is in this environment that community

cohesion is promoted and continues to be developed. The school recognises the need to carry out a formal audit to ask curriculum areas to identify strengths and opportunities to develop this aspect of the school's life. Currently, however, there is a good range of activities that contribute to community cohesion not least through personal, social, health and citizenship education. There are many strong links with the community that allow students to engage with, and develop better understanding of, UK and global communities.

The financial management of the school is secure. Recent auditing by the local authority showed the school to have no areas of deficiency and almost all areas were described as good or very good. Procedures are robust and systematic, for example, the frequent reporting of financial matters to the finance sub-committee of the governing body. There is much evidence of a governing body that is fully engaged in the life of the school and which provides both challenge and support to the school.

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Annex A

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

On behalf of the inspection team I want to thank you for the way you helped us during the inspection of your school. Throughout our visit you were well behaved, courteous and demonstrated good attitudes to your work. It was very clear from the interviews we had with you and the questionnaire responses we received from your parents and guardians that you enjoy school and think that you are safe and well cared for. We believe, as you do, that the teaching is good; teachers were described as 'ace' and many of you used similar positive words to describe their views.

We found that your school is providing you with a good education. The standards in the school have risen since the last inspection because of the hard work carried out by the school leadership, teachers and yourselves. No groups of students are missing out on the opportunity to learn. A few students are not taking full advantage of what the school offers and they need to make sure they take part fully in class and out-of-class activities. As you try to do your best we are sure the school will do its best to support you to be successful.

While there were no aspects of your school found to be less than satisfactory, we believe even the good can be better. We have asked your school to:

- make sure that all students should have work that challenges them to make the best progress
- develop marking and assessment so that students in all subjects receive the feedback they need to improve
- encourage those students who are not engaged to take part fully in class and in activities outside the classroom and after school.