

James Brindley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131473
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	328596
Inspection date	24 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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 (total)	615
Sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J C Coulson
Headteacher	Nicky Kendall
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2005
School address	Bell Barn Road Edgbaston Birmingham B15 2AF
Telephone number	01216 666409
Fax number	01216 666956

Age group	3–19
Inspection date	24 September 2008
Inspection number	328596

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, school documentation and assessment information. This inspection evaluated the following issues: the overall effectiveness of the school; how well pupils' progress is measured and how this information is used to secure improvements; the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation and what use is made of target-setting. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

James Brindley Media Arts College educates pupils who are unable to attend their local school due to a wide range of medical and mental health needs. The school is spread over thirteen sites across the city of Birmingham. Approximately 5,000 pupils are taught each year. The length of stay varies from a few days to over a year. The social, economic and ethnic backgrounds of pupils reflect that of the city of Birmingham. Although the school's age range caters for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, there were no children on roll at the time of the inspection. The school gained specialist status for media arts commencing in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

James Brindley Media Arts College is an outstandingly effective school. The new headteacher together with the newly appointed senior leadership team are relentless in their pursuit of school improvement. They have refused to be complacent and have not only maintained the previous high standards but have brought about further developments. They strive to make the school, in their own words, as 'outstanding plus'. The recently acquired specialist school status is a good example of further improvement and currently is the only hospital school to have achieved this status. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school and many said that the school was a lifeline to them and their children. One parent commented, 'I thought my son's education was lost. I will be eternally grateful for the high level of care and education he has received.'

Standards on entry to the school are generally below average, as most pupils have suffered disruption to their schooling due to medical conditions. However, the progress that pupils make during their stay is excellent. Pupils respond well to the high, but sensitive expectations made of them. They achieve really well in a wide range of academic and vocational courses, despite their medical difficulties. However, the school recognises that there are some pupils, who with some targeted support and encouragement could achieve more GCSE qualifications than they currently do. Pupils' progress is excellent because teachers swiftly assess pupils' abilities on entry to the school, source work from the pupils' host school where possible and then set clear individual targets for pupils to achieve. The school is beginning to make good use of whole-school targets to further raise standards. For some pupils, particularly those with mental health issues, the gains in self-confidence and self-esteem are remarkable. A measure of the school's success is the impressive number of pupils who are able to return successfully to their original school or progress to their next phase of education.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding because at all sites the primary focus of the school's work is to meet pupils' health and emotional needs as well as their learning needs. The result of the excellent ethos of care, high expectations and supportive relationships pupils have with staff is that pupils, even those with a history of serious difficulties in attending school and those who spend considerable time in the hospitals, make outstanding progress in regaining their self-confidence towards becoming as independent as possible. They readily and confidently speak with visitors as individuals, or collectively as members of the school's 'pupil parliament'. They tell of their enjoyment of learning and the respect they have for their teachers. Pupils behave very well, feel safe at school and make a serious attempt at their learning even when, due to their conditions, this is difficult for them. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and they develop an excellent awareness of tolerance and diversity. Attendance is good because most pupils attend as regularly as their medical conditions will allow.

Helping to drive the progress of pupils is the exceptionally high quality of teaching. Lessons are vibrant, and carefully structured. Thorough planning takes into account both pupils' academic and medical needs. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used innovatively to bring lessons to life. For example, in one English lesson, a moving multi-media presentation was used to highlight to pupils the importance and power of protest poetry in the Vietnam War. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, which is delivered with enthusiasm and passion. In addition to this, they have good knowledge of medical conditions and specific syndromes and how these affect pupils' learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are

excellent, and staff are sensitive to the difficulties each pupil faces so they can provide the best possible help to ensure their learning is promoted strongly.

The school's highly personalised approach to pupils' learning is aided by the excellent curriculum, which meets the wide range of needs of pupils exceptionally well. The school offers excellent enrichment opportunities, and the recently acquired specialist status will allow it to offer more courses and experiences in the lead subjects of English, art and ICT and across the wider curriculum. The wide range of vocational courses covers diverse areas such as construction, sports, catering and the performing arts. ICT is used to maximum benefit. For example, pupils too ill to attend lessons in hospital, access lessons via a laptop or participate in video conferencing meetings.

The school's close partnership with parents and a range of agencies, successfully addresses pupils' medical barriers to learning and is a result of the outstanding care, guidance and support that the school provides. Parents are quick to speak of the exceptional support they gain in helping them understand and manage their children's needs, especially when children are returning to mainstream schools or moving to the next stage of their education. All staff rigorously follow child protection, risk assessment and health and safety procedures. For pupils who spend considerable time at the school, target-setting is used effectively in promoting their personal, social and academic development.

The school is a complex and diverse organisation which is led and managed exceptionally well. The consistent high quality of provision that has been achieved across the dispersed sites is impressive. The headteacher provides confident and energetic leadership and has secured a widely understood commitment and determination to make the school the best it can be. Teamwork, friendliness and high expectations are strong features of the school, and pupils benefit well from this approach. An example of the school's high expectations is that it will only appoint new teachers of the highest calibre. There are thorough systems to check the work of the school and assessment information has been used effectively to pinpoint where further improvements are needed. For example, monitoring revealed that pupils on the autistic spectrum disorder were performing less well in creative subjects and successful interventions were put in place to improve this aspect. In the strive to avoid complacency, the school is too cautious in judging some aspects of its work. Improvement planning is well judged and provides the school with a clear strategy for continued improvement and developments. The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well to ensure learners demonstrate an understanding of respect and appreciation of people from varied backgrounds.

The governing body is extremely committed and involved in the life of the school and provides both support and challenge. It has been very active in preparing the bid and securing specialist status for the school. Given the strong partnership-working, energy and commitment of staff and governors, the school has an excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Although the school educates some post-16 students, there is no formal sixth form. A small group of post-16 students who are serious offenders or have psychotic difficulties and often have had little formal previous education undertakes vocational and, where appropriate, academic qualifications. For example in 2006, six students gained GCSE passes and in 2007, some students achieved a distinction in information and communication technology (ICT) and a few progress to start A-level courses. Given the nature of their difficulties and fragmented previous education,

pupils' progress is outstanding because for many it is the first time they have experienced success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Where possible, increase the numbers of pupils achieving five A* to C GCSE grades.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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.

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

25 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of James Brindley Media Arts College, Birmingham, B15 2AF

I enjoyed my visit to your school, meeting and talking with you. Your school is a lively and vibrant place to be and many of you commented how good the school is at helping you to overcome your difficulties so that you can do as well as possible. Many of you are able to return to your original schools to continue your learning.

You make excellent progress, whatever your length of stay at the school. The achievements of those of you who stay longer at James Brindley, for example in examination and vocational courses, are impressive. The teaching you receive is outstanding and staff are excellent at balancing your need to learn whilst recognising that you face particular difficulties. Staff are very good at making your lessons interesting and use information technology innovatively to help some of you access lessons, even when in hospital. You are given excellent opportunities to gain nationally recognised awards in a wide range of subjects. The achievement of the school in gaining specialist status for media arts will increase your opportunities even more and promises exciting developments in the future.

You are looked after excellently and the school is outstanding in working with many other people to ensure you get the help and support you need. Your personal development is outstanding. You make extremely good progress in becoming mature young people and you are polite, friendly and express your views confidently.

Your headteacher, along with other members of staff and governors, has worked very hard to make the school outstanding. They have all done a fantastic job in making sure that the school is a warm, safe, friendly and exciting place to be.

To make the school even better, I have asked your headteacher to look at increasing the numbers of pupils who achieve five GCSE qualifications, where possible.

You can play your part in maintaining your excellent school by continuing to work hard and enjoying lessons. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Price Lead inspector