

# Brantridge School

Staplefield Place, Staplefield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 6EQ

## Inspection dates

17–18 October 2017

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	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, regular changes in senior leadership positions, coupled with poor governance, have resulted in a decline in standards.
- Despite new interim leaders bringing about some rapid improvement, historical weaknesses have left a legacy of low expectation, weak appraisal of staff performance and disjointed approaches to checking the effectiveness of the school.
- Leaders' checks and evaluations of the school's effectiveness are sometimes overgenerous or underdeveloped.
- Interim leaders' plans for improvement are not finalised. Despite quickly getting to grips with behaviour and safeguarding arrangements, interim leaders' plans to improve teaching are underdeveloped.
- Other leaders, including subject leaders, are not as effective as they could be. Weak appraisal means their potential has not been realised.
- Teaching is inconsistent. Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning are not ambitious enough. Pupils' work is often formulaic and unchallenging. Therefore, pupils' progress is not as strong as it could be.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve how staff manage pupils' behaviour. However, these changes are not embedded. Consequently, there remains a reliance on restraining pupils, and exclusions remain too frequent. Pupils' attendance is not improving.
- Pupils are safe. However, some safeguarding arrangements are not as embedded as they should be. Recent changes to leadership have resulted in some much needed improvements. However, the quality of some record-keeping still needs improving.

### The school has the following strengths

- The interim leadership team has had a significant impact in a very short amount of time. Staff are fully behind the high expectations that are now being set.
- The curriculum has a number of strengths. Outdoor learning and the use of therapies help to ensure elements of the curriculum on offer are well designed for the pupils' needs.
- Some teaching is of a high standard. Where this is the case, pupils make better progress.
- Strong pastoral relationships underpin a strong sense of community at the school. Staff share a commitment to do what is right for the pupils.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
  - establishing the higher expectations of new leaders
  - improving checks on teaching and learning to ensure a deep understanding of where there are strengths and weaknesses
  - implementing robust plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning
  - securing substantive post-holders in senior leadership positions and embedding the improvements to the effectiveness of governance arrangements by securing the transition to the new trust
  - strengthening the effectiveness of subject leaders so that they have more impact on the quality of pupils' learning in their areas of responsibility
  - continuing to improve safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that paperwork and records reflect the improved practice.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
  - raising teachers' and teaching assistants' expectations of what pupils should learn and do
  - securing greater consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across classes and subjects
  - making sure that pupils are given opportunities to apply their skills in a wider range of contexts
  - supporting teachers to make better use of assessment to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
  - securing the new expectations for managing behaviour so that the need for physical restraint and exclusion continues to decline
  - improving pupils' attendance.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, both the previous headteacher and her replacement have left the school. Interim leadership arrangements have been secured through collaboration between the outgoing Radius Trust and the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust that is due to take the school over. Despite these interim leaders having a very positive impact in a short amount of time, a legacy of weak leadership and management, coupled with poor challenge from the governing body, has led to a decline in standards. For example, previously established systems for checking teaching, learning and assessment have not been maintained. As a result, there are now considerable variances in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across year groups and subjects. These weaknesses have gone unnoticed and unchecked for some time.
- New leaders have rightly prioritised improving safeguarding arrangements and strengthening how the, often challenging, behaviour of pupils is managed at the school. This means the leaders have had little time yet to check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in depth since their arrival. Interim leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness, therefore, are limited and plans for improvement underdeveloped. Previous leaders' evaluations were too generous and not rooted in a thorough enough evaluation of the school.
- Leaders have been too slow to introduce effective assessment systems that reflect changes in national expectations. Consequently, teachers and leaders continue to rely too much on assessment information that was developed before the abolition of levels. Furthermore, attempts to change how the school assesses pupils' progress have been stalled because of the turbulence in senior leadership positions. Consequently, teachers and leaders continue to expect too little of pupils academically, and the use of assessment is not as effective as it should be to support leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school.
- A historical lack of formal appraisal for staff at the school has limited leaders' impact on improving teaching. A lack of join up between checks on teaching, robust performance management and appropriate training means teaching is not improving well enough. A legacy of weak leadership has meant that leaders' evaluations and plans to improve teachers' practice have not kept up well enough with national changes in expectation. Consequently, teaching is not challenging enough to ensure that pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Subject leadership is not as effective as it could be. Recent turbulence in senior leadership, alongside poor appraisal, means that those who have subject-leadership responsibilities have not had their potential realised. Consequently, their roles as subject leaders remain underdeveloped and they have not been given enough time to have a sufficient impact on improving the quality of learning.
- Leaders have developed aspects of the curriculum that meet the needs of pupils well. For example, pupils report very positively about the learning and experiences they have when learning outside. Furthermore, leaders have ensured that pupils get useful and regular access to speech and language and occupational therapies as part of their

individual programmes of study. Fundamental British values and equality of opportunity are promoted well. Pupils make a telling contribution to their school community and often beyond. For example, pupils have laid wreaths at the local monument alongside pupils from other schools as part of the annual calendar of events on Armistice Day.

- Leaders have successfully developed a strong sense of community at the school. Staff speak positively about their work and are proud to work there. Strong relationships between staff and pupils have established a culture of care and trust. Staff often go the extra mile to share positive experiences with pupils and show that they care. Consequently, pupils are often keen to do their best and often show good attitudes to their work.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium is well-considered. The proportion of pupils who benefit from the grant is larger than normal, but distributed across a small cohort of pupils overall. Consequently, leaders use the money to subsidise specific elements to bolster individual pupils' programmes of study. However, the impact of the experiences of each individual is typically supported or limited by the strength of teaching in their class. Therefore, those who are in classes with the strongest teaching often make the best progress. However, as with pupils, staff do not have high enough expectations for what pupils can achieve academically and consequently, many pupils do not diminish the gap in their progress compared to other pupils nationally.
- Leaders have made good use of the primary sport fund. Pupils have access to high-quality physical education lessons through regular visits to a local sports centre where they learn gymnastics and swimming. Teachers accompany pupils to these sessions where they are able to reflect on and develop their own practice.
- Until recently, the use of external support by leaders was limited. However, since the arrival of the interim executive headteacher and interim headteacher leaders are now making much more effective use of external support and challenge. Not only have interim leaders responded with commitment and determination to the actions from a recent quality-assurance visit by West Sussex County Council, but leaders have also made excellent use of external advisers from the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust. For example, interim leaders have worked effectively with advisers to continue to strengthen and improve safeguarding arrangements.

## **Governance of the school**

- Until very recently, governance at the school has been weak. Poor challenge by governors in meetings, alongside irregular visits by governors to see provision, left many areas of weakness unchecked. In particular, governors did not ensure the highest expectations for pupils' outcomes or check the arrangements to safeguard and protect children. Consequently, poor practice crept into the culture of the school. Professional expectations were not maintained. Insufficient progress in improving the school was not routinely challenged or followed up.
- Since the involvement of Orchard Hill College Academy Trust at the school, significant improvements have been made to governance arrangements. There are now formal collaborative arrangements between Brantridge and St Dominic's School, another special school that is part of the Radius Trust. These arrangements mean that the

governing body is now led and managed by experienced governors from the partner school. As a result, the scrutiny of leaders' work has significantly improved.

- Governors are now much clearer about what is working well at the school and where improvements are needed. The governing body is setting much higher expectations for leaders. Governors have already visited the school and made themselves available and familiar to staff. Most notably, governors now hold leaders fully to account for the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. Nevertheless, their involvement in the school is recent. Consequently, the difference they have made has not stood the test of time and the changes in their approaches are not embedded.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and continue to improve. In particular, the arrival of the new interim executive headteacher has brought about much greater rigour to how safeguarding policies are managed. For example, the interim executive headteacher follows through on any concerns with determination and thoroughness. She has established much more effective working relationships with safeguarding officers than was historically the case. Together with key staff from the incoming academy trust, she has worked through the areas for improvement that were identified by a local authority quality-assurance visit and an unannounced visit by Ofsted, both in May 2017. As a result, safeguarding arrangements are more resolute, and expectations for professional conduct have been raised.
- The arrival of the interim headteacher has accelerated the rate of improvement further. He has worked effectively with staff to improve how behaviour is managed. For example, the introduction of an 'inclusion room' with a supporting policy has given staff and pupils a much clearer strategy for when things go wrong. As a result, the number of serious incidents and 'red grades' have already significantly reduced. However, as leaders rightly identify, the number of physical restraints is still high and is showing little sign of consistent improvement.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching across the school is variable and not yet consistently good. Teachers' expectations of what pupils could learn are too low. In particular, teachers ask pupils to do similar and predictable work too often. Although this has helped pupils develop better attitudes to learning and has improved presentational skills, pupils are not sufficiently challenged and so do not learn as quickly or as deeply as they could over time.
- Teachers' use of assessment to ensure that work builds on what pupils can already know and do is not effective enough. Too often, teachers do not make good use of what they know about pupils to ensure that work meets the differing needs of pupils. As a consequence, pupils are not consistently challenged.
- Teachers' and teaching assistants' use of questioning is not well established. Too often in lessons, questions are used to guide pupils to complete tasks, rather than to deepen their understanding of concepts or help them understand new ideas. Similarly, teaching assistants are not utilised to support learning as well as they could be. For example, in

some classes teaching assistants' time is not used well enough and so they do not make as much of a difference to pupils' progress as they could.

- The teaching of mathematical skills is limited and lacks depth. This is mainly because teachers lack the subject knowledge needed to plan lessons that help pupils apply their skills and use their understanding to reason when solving problems. This means that, despite improving pupils' attitudes and presentational skills, pupils' ability to make use of what they are being taught independently remains limited. Teachers successfully teach children different methods of calculation. Consequently, pupils often accurately complete large numbers of similar calculations. Pupils often enjoy the success they experience by doing this, but they learn to value the volume of work they produce over the quality of their learning.
- The teaching of reading and writing is more consistent. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often and many enjoy and make the most of the opportunities they have to read both to adults and on their own. Teachers ensure that pupils get an opportunity to write for a number of purposes and at length. However, due to pupils' lack of resilience and independence, a significant proportion do not make good use of the opportunities they are given to write at length, even when they have enjoyed the texts they have studied.
- In some classes, expectations are much higher and so pupils make much better progress. For example, in a key stage 1 lesson about the use of rhyme, pupils enthusiastically used new skills they had learned to put together phrases and sentences to use in their own writing. The high expectations and engagement elicited by the teacher ensured that pupils' ideas and word choices improved markedly as a result of her high expectations, strong use of assessment and lively input.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

## **Requires improvement**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Although there are many strengths in how well pupils' personal development is promoted, leaders have not ensured that school policies are robust enough to promote the welfare of pupils consistently. For example, historical weaknesses in approaches to managing pupils' most challenging behaviour have led to an over-reliance on the use of physical restraint. Despite improvements to the approach to managing behaviour introduced by interim leaders, these have yet to have an impact on the number of restraints that are needed. Consequently, pupils' mental and physical well-being are not promoted well enough.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly average for this type of school. However, there is little evidence to show that attendance is consistently improving over time. Some pupils are absent on too regular a basis. There are very few pupils at the school, so there is no reliable way to compare differences between groups. Pupils join the school having typically gone through long periods of low- or non-attendance in their previous settings. Nevertheless, interim leaders recognise that attendance could be improved further by raising what is expected of every individual.

- Each pupil benefits from a bespoke curriculum planned to meet their individual needs, strengths and interests. Consequently, pupils develop better self-image and aspire to achieve more through their learning than was often the case in their previous educational settings. Work is often presented in manageable chunks and is easily accessible for pupils. Therefore, pupils often take pride in their work and improve their presentational skills. This helps to ensure that pupils develop an improved attitude to learning and are better prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training than they would have been based on their historical experiences of school.
- Pupils speak positively about their experiences of the school. In particular, pupils report that the staff who work with them are supportive and look after them well. Many pupils believe that their self-esteem is improving. Pupils look to make a positive contribution to the school and recognise their place as members of the community. They are helped to develop a broader understanding of what it means to live in a multicultural country.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that they are well looked after. They enjoy excellent relationships with committed and friendly staff. Consequently, they are clear about who they could speak to if they have a concern.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although pupils who attend the school present with very challenging behaviour, the way this has been managed until very recently has not been effective enough. Despite staff knowing pupils' individual needs and circumstances well, this has not been used to ensure that there have been effective plans to manage their most complex behaviour. Since the arrival of interim leaders, expectations of behaviour have been raised and new approaches are already bringing about improvement. However, improvements to behaviour over time are too variable.
- Pupils speak positively about the trusted relationships they enjoy with staff. Good relationships are evident and this permeates throughout the often calm and orderly lessons. Pupil numbers are very small and so the proportions of staff available to support pupils are high. Staff work well together to model positive behaviour and show pupils how to work and play together the right way. Pupils often respond well to this. For example, at playtime staff were seen joining in and showing pupils how to engage in games properly. However, pupils often struggle to put what they are shown into practice at times of disagreement with their peers. Consequently, pupils continue to demonstrate their most challenging behaviour on too regular a basis.
- Pupils report that bullying is not an issue at the school. Staff work very closely with pupils and are quick to pick up when there are issues. There are useful community opportunities built into the school timetable, such as when pupils arrive at the school. Leaders use this time well to talk and listen to the pupils and prepare them for what to expect each day. Pupils are welcoming to people they do not know. They are proud of their school and report positively about many of the experiences they are given.
- Leaders' records of serious incidents, although improving, could still be better. Although key details are often recorded appropriately, the action that is taken, or plans for improving practice, still lack detail and this means there continue to be weaknesses in how records explain what has happened and how incidents were followed through. Exclusions are too frequent. This has come about because of historical weaknesses in

behaviour management and the poor admission arrangements resulting in pupils coming to the school whose needs are more complex than the school is designed to cater for.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is inconsistent. Variances in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment lead to pupils making erratic progress from their different starting points. In some areas, pupils make good progress, but this is not the case in key areas, such as their behaviour and in English and mathematics.
- Work seen in lessons and in pupils' books shows that teachers' expectations for pupils are not consistently high enough. Much of the work that pupils are asked to do is formulaic and predictable because assessment is not used well enough to ensure work deepens and broadens pupils' learning over time. Consequently, despite pupils making useful progress in their presentational skills, they do not make the progress of which they are capable academically.
- Pupils make inconsistent progress in mathematics. Teachers often teach pupils strategies to enable them to experience success when completing calculations. However, this leads to pages of similar work where pupils are not extending, deepening or building on their learning. Too few opportunities to explore mathematical concepts through investigation mean that pupils are not able to apply what they have learned or develop the key skills of problem-solving.
- Pupils make better progress in their reading and writing. Teachers help pupils develop an interest in reading by planning work that allows pupils to experience a range of texts that are age appropriate and of interest. Pupils are challenged to write across a range of contexts. However, some pupils make better use of these opportunities than others.
- Due to the size of the school, comparisons between different groups are difficult to reliably make. However, different groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make similar progress as each other. Where teaching is stronger, all groups make better progress; conversely, where expectations remain low, all groups do not do as well.
- Pupils tend to come to the school with starting points that are much lower than is typical for their age. Consequently, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 is typically much lower than would be expected. Progress information shows that pupils make broadly average progress from their starting points compared to their peers nationally. However, this is stronger in reading than in writing and mathematics.

## School details

Unique reference number	134063
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10041495

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	6 to 13
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ken Cowdery
Interim Headteacher	Mr Dafydd Roberts
Telephone number	01444 400228
Website	<a href="http://www.brantridge-school.co.uk">www.brantridge-school.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@brantridge-school.co.uk">head@brantridge-school.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	22–23 January 2015

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Brantridge School is a school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. The school is part of the Radius Trust. However, there is currently an academy order which means the school will shortly become part of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust. Since the last inspection two headteachers have left the school and there are currently interim arrangements in place.
- All pupils have either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of the pupils eligible for the pupil premium is about three quarters of the school population, which is much higher when compared with national figures.

- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average. However, the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average when compared with national figures.
- No pupils access alternative provision.
- There is residential provision for around a quarter of the pupils. This inspection was aligned with a progress monitoring inspection of the residential provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons across the school, just under half with the head of education. They observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons. Inspectors analysed records of pupils' achievement, talked with a group of pupils, and scrutinised information about pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, those supporting the school from Orchard Hill College Academy Trust, and leaders responsible for safeguarding. Inspectors also met two governors, one of whom is the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors looked closely at school documentation, including minutes of governing body meetings, the school's analysis of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, reports provided by admitting local authorities, records related to safeguarding arrangements, and assessment information about pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took account of 12 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also reviewed 10 responses to the staff survey.

## Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Clare Gillies

Ofsted Inspector

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