

Brent Knoll School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100760
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	323335
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Charalambos Loizou

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	127
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tom Livingstone
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Sharpe
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Mayow Road London SE23 2XH
Telephone number	020 8699 1047
Fax number	020 8291 7216

Age group	4–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Brent Knoll is a special school for boys and girls who have any of a wide range of learning, emotional, medical or behavioural difficulties. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision for five Reception-aged children. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and are admitted from maintained schools across Lewisham as well as from schools in other local authorities. The majority of pupils, two thirds, have autistic spectrum disorders, including Asperger's Syndrome. The large majority of pupils have complex learning needs in addition to difficulties with communication, speech and language. Nearly half of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The rest come from a range of other backgrounds and minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Black British African or Caribbean heritage. A very small proportion of pupils are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The school has well-established links with other schools, colleges and organisations and has achieved the Quality in School Study Support charter mark in recognition of its extensive range of out-of-school provision and enrichment activities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school has made very good progress since its last inspection and provides excellent care and an outstanding education for its pupils. Excellent leadership and governance, combined with the work of a dedicated and highly skilled staff team, underpin the school's success. The headteacher, staff and governors are committed to meeting the needs of every pupil and family, and have continually striven to improve all aspects of the school's provision. Since the last inspection an increasing number of pupils with complex learning difficulties have joined the school, and the school has been successful in adapting its curriculum and teaching to fully meet these wide-ranging needs. Consequently, pupils of all backgrounds and abilities achieve extremely well in both their academic and personal development. Nearly all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed their complete satisfaction with the school. Many paid tribute to the dedication of the staff team, and believe that the school makes a big difference to their children - as one stated, 'Brent Knoll has changed my child from an aggressive, angry, confused boy to a happy, confident and mature young man.' The pupils themselves expressed their complete satisfaction with the school; as one put it, 'I got my headteacher award because everyone has helped to turn my life around.'

Given the complex range of pupils' speech and language difficulties, particularly in their use of expressive language and literacy, pupils are successful in improving their communication skills at a rapid rate. Pupils' academic standards vary widely, but are understandably low overall, though the progress they make in relation to their extremely low starting points is excellent. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and the school helps them take part in and contribute to the community, so preparing them extremely well for their adult lives. Pupils clearly enjoy school, and their behaviour is outstanding.

Reception children benefit enormously from the high quality of welfare and education provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teaching and support staff provide a highly effective and stimulating range of activities for the children, so that their welfare needs are fully met, and as a result their learning and development is rapid. Throughout the school, the quality of teaching is never less than good and, given the impact that it is having on the pupils, it is outstanding overall. Teachers plan their lessons assiduously, with careful attention given to meeting the needs of individuals. Teachers and learning support assistants tailor activities carefully, often adapting individual education plans, to ensure that pupils reach their expected and challenging targets. Excellent assessment systems ensure that the staff monitor pupils' progress closely and accurately to adapt their planning to the specific needs of all pupils, including those learning English as an additional language. This ensures that all pupils make at least good, and often outstanding rates of progress. Teachers' assessments and national test results show that typically pupils make better progress in reading and mathematics than they do in writing. Although lessons sometimes incorporate a good range of writing activities, there is still scope to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise and edit their writing independently.

The curriculum is extremely well devised and effective throughout the primary and secondary age range, and there is strong pastoral support and guidance for all pupils in this highly inclusive school. There is a consistent approach across all key stages to meeting individuals' needs, which is also reflected in the high quality of support provided by well-qualified and skilled learning mentors and support assistants in all classes. This successfully promotes pupils' personal development and well-being and ensures that pupils are safe and can contribute to their school

and wider communities. The headteacher insists that despite the pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they are all entitled to a full programme of National Curriculum subjects, including modern foreign languages. In addition, an extensive range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities are provided that includes sport, music, drama, dance and fine art, which are having an extremely positive effect on the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils regularly participate in local and city-wide competitive sports events, including swimming galas, cricket festivals and athletics meetings. Residential and day visits are extensive and are thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils, and include the recent visit to Boulogne in France where, as one pupil proudly explained, some of them tried the local delicacy of l'escargot! The art, design and technology displayed around the school is of a high standard, reflecting how successful the staff are in getting the very best from the pupils, as well as the fact that pupils themselves benefit from the satisfaction of producing a wide range of art, prints and sculptures that extend their creative and cultural development. A rich and highly effective programme of personal, social and health education helps pupils to adopt healthy and safe life styles. This includes, for Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils, an excellent programme of sex and relationships education that prepares them very well for responsible adulthood.

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. Governors are highly committed and effective. Together with the headteacher and senior staff, they seek parents' and pupils' views through the pupil forum and parent surveys. The school keeps parents well informed, and the staff are very well respected by pupils, parents, and staff from support services that the school has well-established links with. All staff approach their work with the necessary sensitivity and respect for all pupils; as one commented, 'Our teachers and learning mentors are great and very helpful. We know who to go to if we are worried.' Accurate evaluations of the school's performance and a strong track record of improvement demonstrate that the school has excellent capacity to continually develop further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The staff are very skilled and effective in laying excellent foundations for children's learning, development and well-being, and provision is exceptionally well managed. Reception children join the school with very low level communication, language and literacy skills, as well as mathematical abilities that are well below those expected of four-year-olds. The teaching is excellent and enables the children to make rapid progress towards the early learning goals for children this age, although most children are well short of the expected levels for five-year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they start Year 1. Children make outstanding progress in their personal, social and emotional development, which is reflected in their excellent behaviour and attitudes to each other. Their progress in communication and language is very good, because they enjoy a stimulating range of stories and role play that helps them to recount stories or act out the part of characters or animals portrayed in books. The children thoroughly enjoyed listening to stories read aloud from the 'big book', prompting them to communicate their thoughts to other children. Teachers' planning successfully incorporates interesting tasks which have a positive impact on improving the children's language, problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy skills. There are good opportunities for the children to develop their early writing skills, although this could be extended further with a wider range of writing tasks and resources, including the use of interactive technology. Very accurate assessments of children's progress, performance and welfare are maintained, and these help to inform parents about how well their children are doing. The children thrive on the opportunities to explore the outdoor areas safely

and productively, which improves their physical and creative development very well. There are excellent opportunities for the children to work with older pupils in Years 1 and 2, so they can share ideas and reflect on their learning and experiences with others. The children successfully develop their knowledge and understanding of the world around them, as well as an understanding of how they can contribute to their school when tidying away or helping others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities in lessons for pupils to write independently to accelerate and maximise the progress they make in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils of all backgrounds and capabilities make outstanding progress in their academic, personal, social and emotional development. Their attainment on entry varies, but is typically very low when compared to age-related abilities. Pupils achieve extremely well because of the outstanding way the staff support their personal development, communication skills and behaviour. Consequently, they become ready to learn more effectively. Progress is clearly shown in the regular achievement of challenging targets set on pupils' individual education plans. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection, as improved assessment procedures have enabled the staff to analyse test and assessment data accurately to improve pupils' achievements in core skills such as reading, writing, mathematics and information and communication technology. Last year's test results for Key Stage 4 show that Brent Knoll pupils made higher than average rates of progress in English and science in relation to their relative starting points at the end of Key Stage 2. Senior staff have already analysed and put in place measures to accelerate the progress that Key Stage 4 pupils make in mathematics to match the very good progress that they make in Key Stages 1 to 3. Similarly, teachers have acted effectively to improve pupils' attainment and progress in speech, communication and reading, with good improvements to writing by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, although more should be done to maximise opportunities for pupils to write independently in lessons across all key stages. Some pupils do particularly well in every key stage to reach age-related expectations, and there has been success for all students in entry-level GCSE results by the end of Year 11. Workplace learning and skills, and accreditation through the school's strong links with local colleges and business partners, enable many pupils to access further education or work-related skills in the wider community. The excellent achievement of lower-attaining pupils, as well as those in the early stages of learning English, is clearly evident in their individual records and reports. Overall, pupils' achievement prepares them very well for further education and adult life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Many enter the school confused or distressed because of their previous negative experiences or a sense of failure. In a short time pupils feel valued and appreciated as individuals, with everyone having something to offer. They soon become sociable, well-motivated individuals who enjoy school. They learn to take part in and give back to the school, as well as the local and wider communities, for example through assemblies, charity work and the use of community facilities. The pupil forum enables pupils to seek and represent the views of others. Pupils understand and abide by the school rules, and society's moral code. The challenging behaviours that some exhibited in the

past, which have the potential to interfere with learning, diminish. Pupils develop confidence and self-belief, for example when volunteering to show visitors around the school, or to read aloud and share their thoughts in front of other pupils in lessons. They enjoy school, and their attendance is excellent. Pupils show consideration for one another, and incidents of bullying or racism are extremely rare. They enjoy cultural celebrations and expression through art and music. Most understand how to choose healthy options and thoroughly enjoy physical activity and exercise through the many opportunities they are given to participate in sport and team games. Pupils understand how to eat healthily, and combine this with enterprise skills through food technology when learning about the world of work in a local restaurant. Pupils feel safe and happy in school, which is often a contrast to their previous school experiences. This is shown by their positive relationships and outstanding attitudes to work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is very well supported by constructive monitoring and wide-ranging professional development that extends to all staff. A significant amount of teaching is excellent, and there are outstanding elements to many lessons. These include a consistent approach to supporting pupils' behaviour and communication skills, and a very calm approach which helps them to stay focused on their work. Staff know each individual very well, and work is closely matched to their needs and abilities. Work is effectively underpinned by careful and accurate assessment, so that lessons are planned in considerable detail to ensure that future lessons build on and extend what the pupils already know and can do. All adults work very well together, including highly skilled teaching assistants and learning mentors who are very effective in supporting the pupils and their behaviour. Some lessons miss opportunities to incorporate more time for writing such as note-taking, editing or reviews. Nevertheless, lessons are usually good or outstanding, so that pupils benefit fully from a stimulating range of fast-paced, challenging activities which hold their interest, helping them to learn and achieve extremely well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is having a very positive impact on the pupils, and this is consistent in all key stages. The excellent primary curriculum builds very well on the outstanding provision made for Reception children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The leadership team, together with subject and phase leaders, successfully adapted the Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that there is a smoother transition between Years 6 and 7. This has been extremely effective in ensuring that Year 7 students study the core subjects with the same class teacher in a way similar to primary pupils, and receive specialist teaching in some subjects such as science, technology, art and design and religious education. Curriculum development and enrichment are extensive and highly effective. Aspects such as work-related learning and an excellent programme of personal, social and health education incorporate an extensive range of visits and visitors to the school. Excellent use is made of other secondary schools and colleges, including business partnerships to extend opportunities within GCSE courses and further education programmes. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to make curriculum choices that are linked to accreditation and lifelong learning skills which contribute very well to their future education and preparation for the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There are excellent pastoral arrangements in place. The staff are highly effective in dealing with pupils who are vulnerable or who have lost confidence in themselves. They are particularly skilled at addressing the emotional, behavioural and communication difficulties that affect pupils' learning. The school works very effectively to keep pupils safe and healthy. Well-devised individual education plans are written so that it is clear to the pupils what steps are needed for them to reach their learning and behavioural targets. These plans are monitored closely, and regular reviews enable the staff to devise interventions if pupils are falling short of their targets. The staff provide pupils with regular opportunities to assess their own work or to reflect on their learning. There are effective practices in place to safeguard the health and welfare of the pupils, including enhanced checks on all adults who have access to pupils, in line with statutory guidance. Relationships and communication with parents and carers are excellent, as are the partnerships with other schools and organisations. There are highly effective links with support services that complement the work of the school to provide professional support and advice for the specific needs of all pupils. The school has full-time specialist speech and language support, which is effective in developing visual resources and educational programmes that enhance the support provided for pupils with particularly acute communication difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher takes a strong lead and inspires pupils, staff, governors and the school's community. He has extended the roles and responsibilities of his leadership team and middle managers since the last inspection. This has been successful in increasing the school's capacity to improve, which is reflected in considerable developments. As a result, pupils are achieving very well, and more consistently across the school and in different subjects. The quality of teaching and assessment procedures have improved, and they are effective in helping teachers to provide lessons that meet pupils' wide-ranging needs. In addition, senior leaders have an accurate oversight of pupils' achievements, including a breakdown of the achievement of different minority ethnic groups that enables staff and governors to evaluate the impact the school is having on community cohesion, as well as on pupils' achievements. Systematic monitoring has helped the staff to hold an accurate view of current strengths balanced with a realistic appreciation of what needs to be done to improve. This has led to a thorough analysis of pupils' performance, and the identification of appropriate priorities for further improvement. Subject and phase leaders possess considerable teaching expertise, and are using this effectively to share best practice with other staff and to influence improvements.

Governors possess a wealth of experience and a detailed knowledge of the school. They are a real asset, providing strong support for the headteacher and staff team, and are fully involved in shaping the priorities for school improvement. They take responsibility for key elements of self-evaluation, and work closely with the staff to devise a comprehensive outline of actions with measurable outcomes that helps them to evaluate fully the impact of the school's work.

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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
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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
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	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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
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**

07 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Brent Knoll School, London, SE23 2XH

Thank you very much for welcoming me to your school. I came to see how well you are doing and to see if the school is doing the very best for you. Brent Knoll is an excellent school, and I was very pleased to see that parents are also happy with your school and what it provides.

I really enjoyed your company and the way you were all extremely well behaved and courteous to me and to each other. Your teachers, support staff and learning mentors are doing a great job, and the pupils I spoke to from the pupil forum also confirmed this. One said, 'The staff are great and they really help us.' I know, like you, that the school gives you lots to do, including sports and games. I hope the swimming team did well during their London schools' gala, because they were really excited as they set off on the second day of the inspection. The headteacher, senior staff and governors manage the school very well, and I was particularly impressed with the way they get to know how well you are doing, as well as with the high standards of the teaching I saw in all parts of the school. The youngest children are also doing very well, and I really enjoyed watching them trying to instruct the toy dinosaur how to get to his sweet by giving him the right directions. That was really clever, well done! Other aspects of your work are impressive too. For example, your art work is fantastic and of a very high standard. I was also very impressed with the way you use computers to enlarge digital images - the large model of a chocolate bar in the art room is fantastic; again, well done!

All the staff work hard to ensure that you continue to have an excellent education and that you are very well cared for. I was impressed with the way you work with each other, and the relationships you have with the staff team. Keep this up, because it is really helping the school to carry on improving.

I have asked the governors, leaders and managers to improve one thing in particular, and that is:

- to provide you with more opportunities in lessons to practise your writing skills.

Well done to you all. Please keep this up to continue moving the school forward.

Yours faithfully

Charalambos Loizou

Lead Inspector