

Bower Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102348
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	307978
Inspection dates	26–27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Jennifer Brown HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	776
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs K Ellis
Headteacher	Mrs M Morrison
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Havering Road North Romford RM1 4YY
Telephone number	01708 730244
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Bower Park School is smaller than the average sized comprehensive school. Its roll has grown since the last inspection. It serves a socially and economically less advantaged area in Havering. The turnover of students who attend the school is high. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly higher than average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is well above average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is above average. The school is one of only eight in the country to have achieved All England Badminton Academy Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards and achievement.

Standards and achievement are inadequate at both Key Stage 3 and 4 and the rate of their improvement has been too slow, notably in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school also has not been successful in raising standards and the quality of teaching in ICT (information and communication technology) and business studies, an area for improvement in the last inspection. While there are signs that the rate of improvement is increasing in some subjects, this is not consistent across the curriculum.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The strong emphasis placed on teaching and learning by senior managers has been successful in improving aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning and the consistency of setting clear lesson objectives. Behaviour in lessons has improved and is generally good. This has led to teachers using a wider range of learning activities. Students have good opportunities in some lessons to develop teamwork skills and to use self- and peer-assessment. However, too much teaching is satisfactory and observations of lessons during this inspection found the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has not reduced since the last inspection. Students were observed to be making adequate and in some cases good progress in individual lessons, but the overall rates of progress of older students is not fast enough to make up for the legacy of underachievement in the lower school.

The personal guidance students receive is good and effective use is made of external agencies to help them overcome difficulties. Vulnerable students respond well to rewards, links with peer mentors, and to the positive relationships with their teachers. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but students do not consistently receive sufficient guidance in all subjects on how to improve their work or on how individual tasks measure up to their targets. Those with learning difficulties often make too little progress in some subject areas.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and the school has the capacity to improve. The headteacher and senior managers have worked hard since the last inspection and have successfully improved the culture and ethos of the school and its learning environment. Students, most of whom are proud of their school, appreciate these changes. Students' behaviour has improved and the number of students being excluded has reduced. Almost all students relate well to each other and to their teachers and told inspectors there is now an atmosphere in which people respect each other. One student said, 'It's forever changing, always improving and always lets students be heard'. The school's increasing roll reflects its growing standing in the local community.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory with some strong areas. Many students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community it serves by acting as peer mentors for other students and through their strong contribution to the new house system activities. Staff have worked hard to improve attendance so that is now satisfactory. Punctuality is also improving, but a high proportion of students believe that it is acceptable to arrive after the start of morning registration. While students have appropriate opportunities

to experience the world of work, their skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and independent learning are too low.

The curriculum is satisfactory and recent changes to the options in Years 10 and 11 have resulted in a wider curriculum, better suited to meet the needs of those students for whom GCSEs are not the best choice. The school is well positioned for the introduction of the new diplomas through leading the most recent bid for creative media studies on behalf of the local authority.

Senior leaders have satisfactory knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses; however, some of their judgements are more positive than the inspection team's. There has been a significant turnover of staff since the last inspection which has now stabilised. Monitoring and evaluation processes are strengthening, but many actions to bring about improvement are relatively new. The school is rich in data but managers are not bringing together and analysing performance information in a way that gives them a clear overview of current performance and the impact of actions taken to bring about improvement. Standards have not risen sufficiently and so the school provides inadequate value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 particularly in the core subjects and in ICT and business studies.
- Significantly improve the proportion of good teaching and learning experienced by students.
- Ensure all teachers maximise learning and students' progress throughout lessons and provide high quality feedback when assessing students' work.
- Ensure managers at all levels have a clear overview of current performance and clearly account for the impact of actions taken to bring about improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards and achievement are inadequate. Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average. Standards at Key Stage 4 are well below average. While they have improved slowly over the last two years this has taken them to where they were at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of students attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level, including English and mathematics, in 2007 was very low, particularly for girls. The rate at which students are gaining relevant knowledge, skills and understanding is variable. It is best in art and design, drama and geography, but is too low in business studies and ICT. Students' progress between the ages of 11 and 16 is variable and in 2007 was exceptionally low.

Standards at Key Stage 3 were very low in 2007. For the last four years, the gap in students' attainment compared to the national average has doubled. This is because students are not making the progress they should between the ages of 11 and 14. Standards and achievement for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mirror those of most other students. Students from minority ethnic groups attain higher standards and make satisfactory progress in contrast to performance generally in the school.

Lesson observations carried out during the inspection and information provided by the school show that while students are making better progress than before in some subject areas, this is not sufficiently consistent across all areas of the curriculum. Significant numbers of students are still not meeting the targets that have been set for them at both key stages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall with some strong features. Where they have opportunities, in either lessons or assemblies, to think deeply about issues they show mature attitudes. Older students in the student leadership team make a good contribution to the well-being of younger classes, for example, acting as mentors to support them. Students enjoy activities in the performing arts, and have a sound understanding of the multicultural nature of the area. Achievement both in work and in behaviour is encouraged by the popular system of rewards. Students' behaviour has improved. The number of exclusions from lessons and from the school has reduced, although the number of students sent to the inclusion unit is high. Students feel safe in school and say teachers have worked hard to prevent bullying and almost eradicate racist name-calling. They work responsibly with equipment and know how to keep themselves healthy. Students' preparation for economic well-being is inadequate because of their low standards in basic skills, although many take advantage of new ways to take responsibility in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Students have good opportunities in some lessons to work in teams and as 'talking partners' helping to enrich their communication and negotiation skills. Insufficient use is made of progress data to inform lesson planning and maximise student learning. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities often make too little progress either because the focus of individual education plans is not sharp enough, or because subject teachers ignore these plans. Many students struggle to establish effective basic skills and develop independent learning. Behaviour is generally good in lessons because pupils understand the expectations of the school through the school code. Students make good use of self- and peer-assessment in art, PE and English when they have success criteria to help them assess their work. Classroom support assistants focus on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and keep useful records that are fed back to the inclusion department.

Marking is variable in quality. Subject staff do not consistently provide helpful feedback to students on classwork and homework, consequently some students have a less clear understanding of how to improve than others. Good practice to moderate students' work is not shared across all curriculum areas. A recent, rigorous analysis of the progress of 'assessment for learning', as a tool for improvement, has produced a clear action plan to take the school forward. Guidance from the team of coaches is paving the way for closer cooperation between departments to strengthen learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Statutory requirements are met. The curriculum is adapted well for students with learning difficulties and those for whom English is not their first language. There has been an increase in the use of computers and interactive technology to challenge more able pupils and support those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Displays in corridors and feedback from students illustrate the positive impact of school visits,

such as the Year 8 visit to a power station, which promoted purposeful learning about real life. The school's curriculum provides good opportunities for students to make lively responses to creativity through the arts, music, dance, visits and sport, especially through the good range of extra curricular activities. Students receive appropriate careers education and guidance. Effective work experience, organized for all students through the Connexions service, builds their confidence and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, but personal guidance is very strong. Problems are dealt with promptly and students feel there is always someone to turn to when the need arises. Younger students are particularly appreciative of 'the zone' where they can always get advice and help. Good support from external agencies helps students overcome difficulties, especially emotional, social and behavioural problems. They react very positively to the image consultant, the life coach, counsellors, nurse and community police. This has resulted in improved attitudes to learning in lessons generally, and to good participation in wider school activities.

Attention to academic guidance is satisfactory. Regular twice yearly, whole-school checks on students' progress ensure that they and their families know how well they are doing across subjects. Students appreciate these review days, respond well to manageable personal targets, and know their academic targets. Students on the remedial reading programmes are nurtured well and generally improve their reading skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior managers have successfully addressed a number of areas for improvement since the last inspection, notably attendance, students' behaviour and some aspects of teaching. Monitoring and evaluation structures and processes are strengthening. Many actions, for example the interventions of senior managers to drive up standards in the core subject areas at Key Stage 4, are recent and it is too early to see their impact. The school is rich in data, but does not analyse and bring it together in a way that enables managers at all levels to have a clear overview of current performance and the impact of actions taken to bring about improvement. Consequently, the school's self-evaluation, though largely accurate, is not underpinned by rigorous analysis of school performance data. Managers are not yet consistently ensuring all staff are using the target-setting process effectively to secure improvement. Clear and regular line management is in place for middle managers. The school is implementing a wide range of professional development activities and using consultants to develop the capacity of middle managers further. However, more work needs to be done and the quality of middle managers is still variable.

The school has experienced significant turnover of staff since the last inspection. Long-term absences and recruitment difficulties, particularly in some subject areas, are placing additional pressures on managers. Staff turnover has stabilised as a result of successful recruitment to some key appointments and a significant number of graduate teachers, who have trained at the school, joining the staff. This is helping to raise the quality of teaching. Now that better

order is established, senior managers are able to focus much more of their attention on raising standards and achievement. Governance is satisfactory overall with some good features. The use of resources is satisfactory and the school and governors are productively reviewing their effectiveness in supporting students' achievement.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A**Leadership and management**

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Bower Park School, Romford, RM1 4YY

Thank you on behalf of the inspection team for making us so welcome and for the way in which you shared views with us, both in formal and informal meetings and in lessons. You were keen to tell us how you think the school has improved, how much you value the changes the headteacher has made and how you feel your views are listened to.

We were impressed by:

- the good contribution older students make to the well-being of younger students in their role of learning mentors
- the good opportunities you have to participate in performing arts activities
- the quality of care and support you receive when you are experiencing difficulties.

We were very concerned that standards at the school are too low and most of you are not making the progress you should while you are at the school. We have asked the headteacher and governors to:

- improve standards and progress at Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly in English, mathematics and science, ICT and business studies
- significantly improve the proportion of good teaching and learning you receive
- make sure all teachers have high expectations of you and give you good advice about how to improve when they are marking your work
- improve the ways in which the school's performance is monitored and evaluated.

The headteacher has been working very hard with other senior staff and the governors to improve the quality of education at the school. You must also play your part by attending school regularly and being punctual at the start of the day. It is important that your behaviour in lessons does not stop other students from learning. Follow the advice of your teachers about how to improve the quality of your work to ensure you achieve your best.

The school will be inspected again in about a year's time and will be visited before then, so inspectors can be certain that the improvements we expect have occurred.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Brown HMI