

Three Bridges

East Hill, Blackwater, Truro, Cornwall, TR4 8EG

Inspection dates

14–16 May 2013

Overall effectiveness

Adequate **3**

Pupils' achievement Adequate 3

Pupils' behaviour and personal development Good 2

Quality of teaching Adequate 3

Quality of curriculum Adequate 3

Pupils' welfare, health and safety Adequate 3

Leadership and management Adequate 3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- There is not enough good and outstanding teaching in the school which prevents students from making good academic progress and achieving well, especially in English and mathematics.
- Staff do not always use their knowledge of students' different levels of academic achievement to plan lessons that challenge them to do their best and make good or better progress.
- There is good use of assessment to judge students' progress in social skills and to help students make good progress in these skills. Assessment is used much less frequently to judge students' academic progress.
- Students with more complex special educational needs are helped to develop their communication skills with advice and support from professionals. However, the current support from speech and language therapists is not sufficient to help students quickly develop their articulation of letters and sounds.
- New leaders and managers have developed clear and appropriate plans to improve the school and some have been introduced. They have not yet been fully developed to raise students' achievement.
- Senior leaders are beginning to monitor the quality of teaching more closely. This has led to training and improvements for some staff in the quality of their teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- Students behave well and enjoy school. They feel safe because staff care for them and praise them when they have concentrated and listened carefully.
- Students make good progress in developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills and understanding.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- The inspector observed five lessons taught by four different members of staff, looked at students' work, records of progress and a range of documentation, including policies, risk assessments, planning and staff training records.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher, staff, students, the proprietor's head of operations and the chief executive officer.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed by three staff in questionnaires returned during the inspection. There were not enough responses on Parent View to be regarded as a representative view.

Inspection team

Mark Lindfield, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Three Bridges is a small special school in Truro which is registered to provide education for boys and girls aged 11–19 years diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum.
- The school, which opened in 2005, is managed by the Devon and Cornwall Autistic Community Trust. In the last two years, a new headteacher and class teacher have been appointed and two class teachers and the previous headteacher have left.
- It is registered to take up to 10 students. Currently there are four on roll in the school. One student attends part-time and is educated part-time in alternative provision. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school aims to develop the confidence and self-esteem of each student in an environment and atmosphere that ensures students are safe and happy. The school was last inspected in March 2010, when all of the regulations were met and the quality of education was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and other subjects by ensuring that:
 - lessons are planned with clear and specific learning intentions, especially for more-able students
 - assessments by staff and students focus closely on students' achievement
 - the frequency of speech and language advice for students with more complex communication difficulties is increased.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the use of pupil tracking information to more closely monitor students' academic progress in different subjects but especially English and mathematics
 - using appraisal effectively to identify and provide training for all staff to further develop their skills and expertise.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards:
 - Ensure that school's complaints procedures include provision for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 25 (f))
 - Ensure one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 25 (g)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' achievement is adequate. They arrive at the school with variable levels of skills, knowledge and understanding across different subjects and within a subject. Achievement is not yet good because students are not sufficiently challenged to make good progress and staff miss opportunities to develop students' reading, writing and mathematical skills across the full range of subjects. As a result, students' overall progress in English and mathematics is adequate and not good enough.

In mathematics, students are able to multiply and divide two- and three-digit numbers confidently. They use calculators to solve two-step mathematical problems, but there are few more complex questions to challenge the more-able students and help them to make more rapid progress. Few students are confident in reading aloud to an adult. Their development of reading skills is encouraged by regular access to a comfortable and well-lit library area and by purchasing books of their choice for the school library. However, opportunities are missed to encourage students to read and write more frequently and apply their skills in other subjects and activities.

Students make better progress in developing their speaking and listening skills because they are often provided with opportunities to develop these skills. Careful assessments are used well to plan activities that are closely matched to their individual abilities. All staff use these assessments well and follow the same strategies, using questions and discussions to build students' communication skills.

Students who are on part-time placements are making progress similar to that of their peers. Students visited in these other settings are supported appropriately so that they are able to make an informed choice and were seen deriving evident enjoyment from music and singing. These activities help to develop their communication skills well, although their progress in developing specific sounds and letters is variable.

Almost all students have failed to thrive in their previous schools and begin to develop more positive attitudes to learning during their time at Three Bridges. Through the school's more positive approach, students are able to concentrate for longer periods, especially during practical activities. Students recently completed Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) in art and photography and were commended for the quality of their artwork, detailed model-making and their wide choice of subject matter.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Students' behaviour and personal development is good. They work cooperatively throughout the day, with good humour and laughter a common feature. Many students have had low levels of attendance and participation at previous schools. The caring, friendly and understanding approach shown by staff results in students wanting to come to school. As a result, students' attendance is much improved and they display improved levels of behaviour, concentration and attention during lessons.

The quality and effectiveness of the school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. There are regular opportunities for reflection at the start, during, and at the end of the school day. The frequent outdoor education sessions where students regularly participate in adventurous activities challenge and excite students and help to build their confidence and self-esteem.

An appropriate citizenship programme promotes knowledge of public institutions and services.

Students gain an increased awareness of different religions and cultural traditions through themed events and activities which are presented in a balanced way so that both sides of an issue are understood. Staff take every opportunity to give positive feedback and praise to help increase students' ability to work by themselves and raise their self-esteem and confidence. In addition, staff carefully record students' comments and evaluate the difference that each trip or activity has made to students' personal development.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate overall. Teachers' assessments of students' achievement and progress are not always used effectively to plan lessons with clear and specific aims that challenge all students to do their best work. In too many lessons, teachers' plans describe the activity that will happen but not the precise learning that will result. For example, in mathematics, students of varying abilities are sometimes provided with similar activities with no different task set for the more-able students to help them make good progress.

Detailed initial assessments are completed on students' social, sensory, emotional, behaviour and communication skills. These initial assessments are used well to provide specific guidance for staff and plan activities well matched to students' social and personal needs. However, there is more limited recording of students' academic levels on entry to the school, which is a key reason why academic work is not so well matched to students' academic needs. Senior leaders are developing their systems to more closely monitor students' progress, raise teachers' expectations and more quickly identify any lapses in progress.

Teaching assistants know individual students well and give regular support and encouragement to help them attempt work. They provide regular evaluations after lessons which provide clear details of social and emotional development but these do not always provide helpful information on students' academic progress.

All staff manage students' behaviour with consideration for their well-being so that the atmosphere in lessons is generally calm and learning proceeds with few interruptions. Teachers provide practical activities that capture students' interest well. For example, students enjoy opportunities to participate in practical science activities and design and technology topics. They carefully research a range of different types of hats, produce an initial design sketch and then construct large black top hats with care and attention to detail. Overall, teaching in subjects such as design and technology and art, and the teaching of the ASDAN, ensure students are adequately prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The quality of the curriculum is adequate. The school meets the needs of students as set out in their statements of special educational needs. Students are taught individually or in small groups which enables them to receive considerable support. The timetable is organised well, with lessons typically of an hour, which helps students to maintain concentration. Students also start and end the day with a relaxed and friendly session which allows for the day's timetable to be shared with students. Individual education plans are based on careful assessments of students' social skills and these are used well to set and revise targets that help students to make good personal development. Academic targets within the education plans are revised less frequently. This is a weakness.

The curriculum for students in Key Stage 3 and 4 covers a broad range of National Curriculum subjects. It is adequate rather than good because chances are missed to develop students' reading and writing skills in subjects across the school. Personal, social and health education is effectively taught using a range of approaches. The school provides a number of well-resourced subject areas. A well-equipped kitchen area for students is clearly labelled so that students are encouraged

to independently select different materials and resources. The school contains specific areas, a library, sensory room and a combined design and technology and art room as well as an extensive garden that develops students' interests and enjoyment.

Students with more complex speech and language difficulties are encouraged to develop their communication skills through organised and planned lessons that build on their skills. Staff receive advice from speech and language therapists that helps students to make progress in naming, describing objects and expressing their choice of alternatives. However, the current level of professional advice and support is not frequent enough to help students quickly develop their articulation of letters and sounds. Those students who are above compulsory school age receive a curriculum that is appropriately matched to their needs.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Adequate

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is adequate and all the regulations are met. All of the required policies are in place, including those for child protection. Policies and procedures to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying are reviewed regularly, understood and applied effectively and thoughtfully by all staff. The behaviour policy contains an appropriate focus on praising the positive aspects of students' behaviour and on involving them in assessing their progress. There are clear procedures around the reporting and sharing of incidents and any incidents are checked regularly by senior managers. All the required checks on the suitability of the proprietor and staff have been completed. All checks are recorded appropriately in a single central record. Personnel files show that recording of recruitment checks is completed and they meet regulations. They are adequate rather than good because the lines of responsibility between the company's human resource department and senior leaders for ensuring that company recruitment procedures are adhered to are unclear.

The proprietor's induction package ensures new staff are made aware of the school's procedures to keep students safe. Staff have been suitably trained in first aid, fire safety and food hygiene, and in safeguarding and child protection at the required level. Risk assessments for all aspects of the school's life and for trips away from the main site are in place. Fire drills are held regularly and fire-fighting equipment and alarms are checked as required by staff and a specialist company so that the procedures to maintain fire safety are adequate overall. Risk assessments for activities and off-site visits, combined with a good level of staffing, adequately maintain the safety of students.

Leadership and management

Adequate

Leadership and management are adequate. Accurate and honest self-evaluation has provided the school with clear priorities to improve and develop. The new headteacher has a realistic view of the school's strengths and has clear plans in place to develop the school further. Although it is too soon to have made a substantial difference to some key areas of the school's performance, she has acted in a relatively short period of time to address weaknesses and improve the school's work. Senior leaders have improved the school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum through staff training and reviewing the policy.

Staff enjoy working at the school and, through a close and supportive team approach, they provide a calm and friendly environment which helps students to develop well. The headteacher has instigated a more active leadership and monitoring of the school's work this year. Monitoring of planning and teaching is now used to inform supervision meetings and is beginning to identify professional development and training for staff to further develop their skills and subject knowledge. For example, staff have recently received appropriate training in behaviour management, which is often organised by the proprietor. The school is developing systems to monitor and track the academic progress made by students from the time they arrive so that staff can identify where students' achievement is not yet good and targets can be set that raise teachers' and students' expectations, especially in reading, writing and mathematical skills.

The school makes available for parents and carers all the required information through written documentation. Termly and annual reports and regular telephone calls keep parents and carers and local authorities well informed about students' achievements and behaviour. The school's complaints policy is available to parents and carers on request but does not specify that the panel to review complaints should comprise of three people, one of whom is independent of the management and leadership of the school. The accommodation is of good quality and meets requirements. Some areas of the school's premises and grounds are in the process of a planned programme of repairs and maintenance but staff are careful to ensure these do not compromise students' health and safety.

The proprietor and headteacher have ensured that almost all the regulations have been met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	129252
Inspection number	420233
DfE registration number	908/6095

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day school for students diagnosed on the autistic spectrum
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–18 years
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	4
Number of part time pupils	1
Proprietor	Donald Harvey
Headteacher	Rebecca Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 March 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£14,280 – £24,914
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