

Brymore Academy

Cannington, Bridgwater, TA5 2NB

Inspection dates 28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and other leaders are ambitious for Brymore and have set it on a clear course to be a successful academy. It has developed a distinct identity based on high standards of achievement and conduct. Leaders have ensured that all groups of students achieve equally well.
- The governing body is effective in holding the school to account. Working through the academy trust, governors have provided valuable expertise in helping to improve the quality of teaching.
- The school has developed the range of subjects it offers so that it meets the needs of all students increasingly well. It promotes students' personal and social development extremely effectively, including through offering a very wide range of activities outside of the normal school day.
- Behaviour in lessons, including those in outside practical areas, is consistently good. Students conduct themselves well around the spacious school site, and behave maturely and responsibly.
- Students feel safe in school. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding requirements are securely met in all aspects of the school's work.
- Teaching is consistently good across the range of practical and academic subjects. Teachers know the students well, ensuring that their planning includes the right level of challenge for all groups.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to learning. They support students well across the curriculum, including in vocational subjects.
- Despite their very low starting points, students achieve increasingly well in most subjects, including in English and in mathematics. Results in horticulture and agriculture are especially high.
- All groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make at least good progress. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' achievement in a few subjects is not as consistently strong as is the case in most others. This limits some students' overall attainment.
- Not all subjects are contributing effectively enough to the development of students' literacy skills, especially in writing.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, 27 part-lessons were observed, including visits to an assembly and tutorial time. Meetings were held with: senior leaders, including the headteacher; middle leaders; members of the governing body; and three groups of students. In addition, the lead inspector met with the Chair of the Bridgwater Academy Trust.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including: school self-evaluation and planning; information on how well current students are progressing; students' work; and a number of school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors took account of the 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors reviewed the 22 responses to a questionnaire for members of staff.

Inspection team

Ken Bush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Simms

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Brymore Academy is a state-funded boys' school with boarding provision available. It is much smaller than most secondary schools. It is situated on a large rural site, which includes extensive gardens for horticulture, as well as its own farm.
- About two thirds of students are boarders, although day students are also expected to undertake a week of boarding per term. The boarding provision is subject to a separate inspection and is not covered in this report.
- The school has on its roll a very small number of students (all of whom are boarders) who are over 16 years of age. These students follow a variety of courses at Bridgwater College. The achievement and the quality of teaching experienced by these students are not reported.
- Until the current academic year, students typically joined the school at the start of Year 9. From September 2014, the school began to admit students in Year 7 also. This has led to a marked increase in the total number on the school roll, with the figure projected to rise still further from September 2015.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs in the school as a whole is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below average. This is additional government funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage.
- A very small number of students in Year 11 follow a Level 1 engineering course at Bridgwater College for part of their education. The achievement of these students is not reported in detail.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school receives some support from a national leader of education (NLE) who is headteacher of Lillian Bayliss School in London. This is mainly related to improving the quality of teaching in specific subjects.
- The school became a sponsored academy as part of the Bridgwater Academy Trust in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in those subjects where performance is not consistently strong in order to increase students' overall attainment.
- Ensure that all subjects contribute equally well to the development of students' literacy skills, especially in writing.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and the governing body have ensured that the school has got off to a strong start since it became an academy. They have made sure that all groups of students have made good progress by the time that they leave the school, including those who started in Year 9 with exceptionally low levels of ability. This reflects the high expectations that staff have of all students. The culture of the school is clearly focused on high standards of achievement and good behaviour.
- Making good use of the expertise and support within the Trust, the headteacher and other Brymore leaders have devised effective plans to ensure that teaching continues to improve. This process has also been helped by the link with the national leader of education. Robust systems are in place to check on the quality of teaching and how well students are achieving. Leaders have an accurate and comprehensive view of the school's effectiveness. Plans for improvement are securely rooted in evidence of what is working well and where there is a need for further work.
- The system to gauge how well teachers have met their targets is rigorous and clearly linked to whether or not teachers receive salary increases. Teachers spoken to by inspectors confirmed that their professional development is given a high priority and that they feel valued. The school is aware that a few staff who had little or no experience of teaching Year 7 students needed additional support this year, and for some, this is continuing. The responses to the inspection questionnaire completed by staff indicate that morale is generally high.
- Middle leaders, including those responsible for subjects, contribute well to school improvement. They are held accountable for the performance of their leadership duties, including how well students achieve. Senior leaders have identified that some departments need to make a stronger contribution to the development of students' literacy skills.
- Leaders manage the additional funding for disadvantaged students well. As far as possible, individual plans are put in place for each student to ensure that they achieve as well as they can. In most cases, this involves some individual mentoring in core subjects. As a result, disadvantaged students progress as well as others.
- The curriculum is fit for purpose and meets the needs of students well. It is distinctive because it puts a strong emphasis in both key stages on the development of practical skills and knowledge in subjects such as horticulture and agriculture. This curriculum continues to be attractive to many students and their parents. As the number on the school roll continues to rise, however, the school is increasingly looking to provide greater choice at Key Stage 4, including through providing more academic options. Leaders are managing this evolving process well.
- Staff ensure that students receive good advice and guidance about the choices available for Key Stage 4 and when they leave school. All Year 11 students spoken to by inspectors indicated that they had clear and achievable plans for the next stage of their education.
- The school offers an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities for students, including in sport and outdoor activities. All students, including those who are not boarders, are expected to take a full part in helping to run the farm and maintain the plots in the school gardens. Students respond with enthusiasm to these challenges and report that they feel that it makes the school different from many others. Staff provide useful before- and after-school sessions in subjects not on the main curriculum; they also offer booster sessions to help improve students' achievement in core subjects.
- Students' personal and social development is central to the school's aim of enabling boys to emerge from the school as well-rounded young citizens with a wide range of skills, abilities and qualities. Assemblies, together with the many and varied leadership opportunities available to boys, help them to develop a strong appreciation of tolerance and diversity in modern British society. The few students over 16 contribute well to the school community.
- The school is an harmonious and welcoming community. Equality of opportunity is well promoted and discrimination of any kind not tolerated. Boarders and day students mix together well both inside and outside of lessons.
- All current safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Policies, including for risk assessments, are detailed and up to date. Leaders ensure that all staff have received the right level of child protection training. Staff are safety conscious, especially in those areas of the school's work where there is higher risk, such as when using farming equipment. As a result of this, students are kept safe.
- Leaders ensure that those students attending Bridgwater College, including those over 16 years of age, are safe and attend regularly. Year 11 students are accompanied by a teaching assistant. Good liaison arrangements with staff from the College ensure that students' progress and behaviour are carefully

monitored.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is effectively holding the school to account for its performance. Many governors in the Trust come from an educational background and use their specialist knowledge well. They have a detailed understanding of how well students achieve when compared with others nationally, including in the different subjects of the curriculum. They are also knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and how it has improved over time. Governors ensure that teachers' performance is well managed and that pay progression is based securely on producing consistently good quality work for the benefit of students. They know what the school is doing to tackle any underperformance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. In the majority of cases, students' attitudes to learning are positive across a range of subjects. They especially enjoy practical subjects and respond with enthusiasm to the challenges offered to them, such as rising at six o'clock in the morning to look after the farm animals. Behaviour in classroom-based academic subjects is also good, as is conduct around the large school site. Students also behave well when attending Bridgwater College.
- Inspectors saw no instances of disruption and only a few instances where students became slightly inattentive. Those students who spoke to inspectors confirmed that this good behaviour is typical. School records show that major incidents resulting in fixed-term exclusion from school still occasionally occur, but are reducing year-on-year.
- Responses to Parent View indicate that the great majority of parents believe that behaviour is consistently good. This view is shared by most, if not all, staff.
- Staff are proficient in managing behaviour well. A significant minority of students who attend Brymore have experienced difficulty in managing their own behaviour before they joined. School records and case studies indicate that, for the majority of such students, their behaviour improves over time. This is as a result of effective support and the development of more positive attitudes to learning.
- Students are generally very proud of their school and maintain high standards of dress through the way that they observe uniform requirements. They are keen to acknowledge the difference Brymore has made to their education.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. This includes those Year 11 students and those over 16 who attend Bridgwater College. Students report that they feel safe in all parts of the school. They are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe in school and outside. They are aware of the importance of using the internet and social messaging sensibly.
- Students report that while bullying does still occur on rare occasions, it is uncommon and is well dealt with by staff. Younger students, especially those who are boarders, noted the value of having older ones to act as mentors. Students stated vigorously that any known bullying is not tolerated by the school community as a whole. Students of all ages understand that bullying can come in many forms.
- There are very few racist incidents. These are carefully recorded and followed-up by staff rigorously.
- Attendance is broadly average over time. Students are routinely punctual to lessons.

The quality of teaching

is good

- As a result of consistently good and improving teaching, students typically achieve well at Brymore.
- Teachers have high expectations of all students. Given that many join the school with very weak basic skills, this enables most students to be much more positive about their learning than they were before they arrived. Excellent relationships between staff and students are a key factor in enabling teaching to be as effective as it is at the school.
- Teachers are adept at planning lessons which, in the vast majority of cases, are well matched to students' needs and interests. Suitable challenge is provided for all groups of students of all abilities because staff know students' strengths and weaknesses particularly well.
- Teachers and other staff use questioning effectively to gauge how well students have grasped the planned learning, knowing when to move them on or when understanding needs further consolidation. This is a

notable feature of the effective teaching of mathematics, which has improved.

- The teaching of English is consistently strong, including in developing students' understanding of how to write with accuracy for a range of purposes, including for examinations. Students' confidence in using language is promoted well through a clear focus on the importance of speaking and listening.
- Students are becoming keener readers than in the past as a result of the school's promotion of the value of reading for pleasure. The weakest readers, especially in Year 7, are supported well, including through the use of phonics (understanding of sounds linked to letters). Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to students' learning in a range of subjects. This includes in horticulture and agriculture where their subject expertise helps to deepen and consolidate students' learning.
- Teachers' marking is highly valued by students and is, in most cases, of good quality. This enables students to be clear about what they need to do in order to improve their work. Homework is carefully planned and has a high status within the school. Students reported that they are expected to complete all homework tasks to the best of their ability.
- The school has developed a clear and well-conceived strategy to improve students' literacy skills across the curriculum. While there is evidence to show that this is beginning to have an impact, not all subjects are teaching literacy skills explicitly enough, especially with regard to writing. In some cases, there are not enough opportunities for students to develop the skills to write at length.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join Brymore from academic starting points which are much lower than those typically found for boys of their age. As a result of good and improving teaching and high quality support, most students make consistently good progress in a range of subjects.
- Students make especially rapid progress in English and, increasingly, in mathematics. The school makes highly effective use of its garden and its farm. Attainment in vocational qualifications in horticulture and in agricultural studies is very high.
- By the time they leave in Year 11, most students have attained results in GCSE and other qualifications which indicate they have achieved well during their time at the school. Students currently in Years 7 and Year 9 also make good progress overall. However, given that many students arrive with significant gaps in their grasp of basic skills, not all develop their literacy skills as quickly across the whole curriculum as they do in English lessons.
- In 2014, students achieved well in most subjects offered, although in a few subjects, notably art, physical education and information and communication technology, this was not the case. This limited students' overall attainment. Inspection evidence clearly indicates that in all of these subjects, attainment in 2015 is on track to be much higher. This reflects well leaders' ability to respond quickly and effectively when any relative underperformance occurs.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are rightly given a particularly high priority in the school, given that they make up a sizeable proportion of those on roll. With some minor variations from year to year, they progress at a similarly good rate to their classmates, and even faster in some cases. This is because the education the school provides meets their needs well. Low ability students in Year 11 progressed exceptionally well in 2014.
- Typically, the school's intake has included a very small proportion of most-able students, although with the arrival of students in Year 7, this is beginning to change. Most-able students achieve as well as others in the school, some gaining A* and A grades at GCSE.
- Disadvantaged students supported by additional funding progress well from different starting points, including in English and mathematics. Their progress overall is very close to that of other students nationally and so gaps are closing quickly.
- In 2014, the attainment of the small proportion of disadvantaged students in Year 11 was lower than other students in the school by the equivalent of just over a grade in English and close to two grades in mathematics. Compared with other students nationally, the attainment gap was two grades in English and nearly three grades in mathematics. However, these gaps are much smaller than before the school became an academy. They also reflect boys' exceptionally low prior attainment and the fact that none of the boys was in the school for more than three years, since most joined in Year 9 at the earliest.
- Those very few Year 11 students who take the engineering course at Bridgwater College benefit from their studies there and make clear gains in their development of work-related skills. This enables them to be well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The school does not enter any boys for examinations earlier than the end of the courses.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139655
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	450061

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–17
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jenny Ashworth
Headteacher	Mark Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01278 652369
Fax number	01278 653244
Email address	mthomas4@educ.somerset.gov.uk

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