

Bramdean School

Richmond Lodge, Homefield Road, Exeter EX1 2QR

Inspection dates

18–20 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils make good progress throughout the school and attainment is higher than average.
- Effective provision for children in the early years (kindergarten) enables them to settle quickly and make good progress. By the time they start formal learning, their standards in literacy and numeracy are above those typically found for children of their age.
- Sixth form pupils are very well supported and challenged. Success rates are high as a result of very effective teaching and learning.
- Teachers know their pupils extremely well, meeting their needs and helping them make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language, are given effective individual support and make good progress.
- Most-able pupils are fully challenged because teachers know their abilities well. As a result these pupils achieve highly.
- Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is of a high quality. The school produces well-rounded individuals with a strong sense of commitment to their communities.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the diverse nature of contemporary society. There is effective promotion of British values, such as democracy and the rule of law.
- The headteacher, who is also the proprietor of the school, has created a learning community in which all feel valued.
- Pupils behave impeccably and their levels of attendance are high. They feel safe, which helps them to thrive and fulfil their potential.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The process of managing the performance of teachers and setting objectives for their training is not clear enough.
- Improvement plans do not demonstrate clearly how the school's success will be sustained.
- Although the school's policy to protect pupils from the risks of extreme or radical views is in place, not all staff are equally confident in their ability to deal with this aspect of safeguarding, should they have concerns.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop a more formal process for checking teachers' work that includes:
 - opportunities for teachers to undertake a self-evaluation of their own performance
 - setting clear and measurable annual performance targets for teachers
 - supporting teachers to meet their performance objectives successfully
 - monitoring progress towards objectives throughout the year
 - implementing stronger systems that enable the school to measure its own effectiveness so that leaders can identify areas for development and priorities for further improvement.
- Ensure that all staff are equally and fully confident in understanding their legal responsibilities when dealing with the risk of pupils' exposure to extreme views.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school's leadership has ensured that all the independent school regulations, including those relating to complaints and the provision of information, and the requirements of the early years, are met.
- The school has a clear vision based on helping pupils to do their best academically, while also enabling them to become positive members of their community and well-rounded individuals. This is reflected in the school's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and discouraging discrimination. For example, the support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs enables them to make good progress.
- Pupils are admitted irrespective of academic ability and all are given good support that helps them make good progress from their individual starting points. The school is a thriving community with a commitment to promoting a culture of respect and tolerance. Relationships throughout the school are extremely strong.
- Leaders are ambitious for their pupils. Whatever their ability, all pupils are expected and encouraged to do their best. They all make good, sometimes outstanding, progress from their individual starting points. Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, and pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported so that they all make good progress and achieve well.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and provides them with a broad and balanced education that inspires them to learn. At the same time there is a focus on promoting English and mathematics, with opportunities to develop skills in these areas across all areas of learning. Reading is a particular strength and is promoted right from the start in kindergarten where there is a daily focus on phonics (understanding letters and the sounds they make).
- Teaching for pupils up to the age of 13 is based around Common Entrance examination requirements. After this stage, pupils follow a range of GCSE courses, with AS- and A-level programmes if they choose to remain at the school in the sixth form. Staff and resources are used effectively, and teaching is strong throughout the school.
- The school's wider ambitions for pupils ensure that the focus is on broadening their learning. For example, the arts, outdoor education and sport enable pupils to develop interests and enjoyment that bring a range of opportunities into their lives.
- Pupils enjoy their learning very much and this contributes to the exemplary behaviour seen throughout the school.
- Safeguarding meets all legal requirements and staff training is in place to help ensure that pupils are safe. Staff training also supports the school in meeting the latest government requirements to protect pupils from the influence of radical or extreme views. Although the policy is in place, not all staff are equally confident in their understanding of how to report any concerns they might have.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the school improvement structures are too informal. For example, there is no clear timetable for the formal monitoring of each teacher that feeds into the process of measuring their effectiveness. This in turn has wider implications for the school, in that it limits the ability to measure the overall effectiveness of teaching in helping pupils to do their very best.
- Similarly, self-evaluation is not always used to ensure that teachers' individual objectives for professional development link directly with the school's identified priorities for improvement. The headteacher has a clear view of what she wants the school to be, and has been successful in creating a school that meets its stated aims very effectively. However, school improvement plans do not give a clear enough view of how leaders will sustain the school's current success, or build on the particularly good practice that can be seen at the moment.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The owner of the school is also the headteacher and so governance is intertwined with day-to-day leadership. The headteacher uses this link to enable her vision to be promoted effectively throughout the life of the school.
 - In her role as headteacher, the proprietor has a clear view of the character of the school and how it supports effective learning. At times there is a lack of clarity about how this translates into the measurement of the effectiveness of leadership itself.
 - Care is taken to ensure the financial probity of the school and to secure its long-term future.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has important strengths that enable it to be successful in helping pupils make good progress and reach above-average levels of attainment. In particular, teachers' professional expertise, knowledge and skills support pupils' learning.
- Many pupils start at the school in kindergarten and remain right through to Year 11 or the sixth form. In this small school with a very stable staff, the teachers develop a very deep understanding of individual needs and know their pupils exceptionally well. In return, the behaviour of pupils is extremely positive and supports effective learning in class. Strengths and weaknesses are catered for effectively, helping all pupils fulfil their potential. In this active learning community teachers act as very positive role models, challenging any negativity such as occasional derogatory language and negative stereotyping.
- Teachers' planning is effective and is directed at helping pupils to learn well, deepening their knowledge and understanding. In small classes, time is used well to ensure a high degree of individualised support. In an atmosphere of mutual respect, pupils become confident in 'having a go', knowing that if an answer is not correct they will be supported and encouraged. In this way pupils are encouraged to become confident learners who enjoy their lessons. Opportunities to strengthen key concepts of English and mathematics across all subjects are used well, supporting high outcomes in reading, writing, communication and mathematics.
- School leaders regularly collate information from class teachers on the progress made in class by each pupil. They use this information alongside the results of formal assessments to monitor progress of individuals, groups and classes. This enables quick identification of any pupil who is not making expected progress. Effective special educational needs leadership enables teachers to provide strong support to help pupils who need extra help to catch up.
- Teachers are skilled in asking good questions. This shows them that pupils are grasping their lessons but it also promotes lively discussion that encourages pupils to think for themselves. Homework is set regularly and is used to provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their work further.
- Pupils use the regular marking of their work to take their learning forward. Good feedback encourages and gives confidence to pupils that they are succeeding and can do well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school encourages and supports pupils to extend their confidence and self-belief, and to develop excellent and positive attitudes to learning. They become thoughtful individuals who are prepared to listen to the views of others, knowing that they live in a country which values the rights of the individual, freedom of speech and belief, and the rule of law. They are positive members of modern British society and active participants in their school and wider communities, aware of their rights and responsibilities. At the time of the inspection, pupils were enthusiastically supporting a charity aimed at helping children living in poverty in other countries to receive presents at Christmas. They understood the advantages that they have as residents in a richer country and saw a moral responsibility to help those less fortunate.
- Pupils value their school and the opportunities it gives them to participate in a wide variety of activities. They accept responsibilities with enthusiasm. This helps them to develop high aspirations and they are rightly proud of their school, many remaining in contact after they have left.
- Pupils are helped by the support they get to consider their futures. While many go on to higher education, those who choose other pathways are equally encouraged. They are well supported by independent careers advice and opportunities to meet a range of employers. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps after leaving school.
- The promotion of safety through careful risk assessments and effective health and safety procedures creates a safe environment and a culture in which welfare is a high priority. In a school where everyone gets on together so well, all agree that this is a very safe place. The regulations around fire safety, first aid and provision for pupils who are taken ill are all met. Pupils are encouraged to adopt positive attitudes to their own safety, while the school takes care that there is no risk that visitors to the school might promote dangerous or extremist views.

- Attendance is high and there are no persistent absences. This reflects the enjoyment of school and everything that it offers, something which also became apparent in discussions with pupils, all of whom participate in a range of wider activities outside the classroom. For example, the annual participation in the Ten Tors Challenge, trekking across Dartmoor, is a real physical challenge that is looked forward to every year. For those who prefer less strenuous activities, the school has a high reputation for its music, with a choir that has broadcast on national radio.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. In every element of school life pupils can be seen to be confident and self-assured learners.
- Extremely positive relationships throughout the school create an atmosphere where pupils are encouraged to develop their own views and opinions and to discuss these in a considered way, while respecting the views of others to think differently. For older pupils this is seen within the enthusiastic teaching of ethics as part of the timetable.
- Impeccable behaviour in and around school reflects the impressive promotion of very positive attitudes, which help prepare pupils for future success in education, employment and adult life. Pupils are self-disciplined, and incidents of low-level disruption are extremely rare because pupils are committed to learning.
- The school has a very successful behaviour policy, with clear sanctions and rewards. A logbook of serious incidents is in place but has not needed to be used, and no pupil has been excluded. In discussions with pupils it is clear that they have a well-developed understanding of what is right and wrong, and of their responsibilities as members of the wider school community. All are encouraged to play a positive role within the school and additional responsibilities are accepted willingly.
- Pupils insist that bullying is not an issue at the school. Indeed, relationships between pupils, and between pupils and their teachers, are extremely positive. This contributes to the obvious enjoyment of school and the strong friendships that are seen throughout. At the same time, pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and the negative consequences of such behaviour. Pupils fully understand the dangers of misusing the internet and social networking sites.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of school life. The headteacher is very clear that academic success is only a part of the school's mission, which is extremely successful in developing the whole person. The arts are reflected in the strong traditions of music and painting, while sport is encouraged through the employment of qualified coaches.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- From the outset, the school focuses on enabling its pupils to make consistently strong academic progress and outcomes are higher than average. Results in GCSE, AS- and A-level examinations are well above the national average, as is the overall attainment of pupils.
- The school has a policy of open enrolment that is not dependent on academic ability. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan, do well because their needs are provided for carefully. Individual education plans are devised and monitored, and the school's special educational needs provision provides effective support to class teachers to ensure that needs, once identified, are addressed with precision. As a result, such pupils make rapid progress and narrow the attainment gap with the rest of the school. This means that they are making much more rapid progress than pupils nationally.
- The same is true of pupils who join the school speaking English as an additional language and who make strong progress as a result of the carefully directed support they receive. This provides clear evidence of the care that is taken to ensure that the needs of specific groups of pupils are identified and met effectively.
- With small numbers in each class, teachers ensure that work matches the needs of every pupil, which helps them all reach their potential. When necessary, the school is quick to bring in the expertise of external professionals to help them identify and address individual needs that cause concern.
- Pupils generally enter the school with levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that are in line with, or better than, those expected for their age. They go on to achieve well and make very good progress from their individual starting points. While there is a focus on English and mathematics, care is taken to ensure that pupils make good progress across the whole range of subjects.

- A much improved process for measuring individual progress has been introduced. Taken together with the results from formal tests, this is starting to create a much more detailed picture of progress. It enables the school to analyse the performance of individual pupils and whole classes, and in different subjects. This reflects improved practice since the last inspection.
- The school's leaders have placed reading right at the heart of pupils' learning and it is a strong focus right through from kindergarten. Pupils quickly become confident readers, showing fluency and understanding which helps them enjoy their wider learning.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Most, including those who go on to the sixth form, will have been at the school since they were three years old. For many, the next destination will be higher education but the school also encourages progress to high-level apprenticeships when this is an appropriate next step and in line with career plans.

Early years provision

is good

- Children join the kindergarten at the age of three and remain until they join the pre-preparatory phase at the end of Year 1. The early years complies fully with all regulations and welfare requirements.
- The early years has a history of high outcomes over a sustained period. It is very effectively led, with high expectations and a close working relationship with parents. This partnership is central to supporting children in making rapid progress.
- Staff quickly assess what children know, understand and can do when they start, as well as discovering their interests and the ways in which they learn best. They use this information skilfully so that children are engaged and actively participate in learning. Children are supported by wide-ranging activities and very good facilities. These include a stimulating outdoor area and a well-equipped indoor space that are very well used to create a range of learning opportunities that motivate and inspire children.
- From the outset, staff focus on the children's learning, particularly in developing their skills of literacy and mathematics. This is reflected in the excellent use of phonics (the understanding of the sounds that letters make). By the time they leave kindergarten, children are confident and fluent readers. Mathematics is also promoted very effectively, so that skills such as measuring are already carried out with precision by the time children move on.
- Children show themselves able to develop a range of very positive social skills, such as sharing, collaborating and listening to others. This shows good promotion of wider learning skills.
- As a consequence of very good practice, children who start with a range of skills that are around or better than those found typically for their age go on to make good progress. The proportion who achieve a good level of development is high, and children are very well prepared to start their more formal education in Year 1.
- Any disabled children and those with special educational needs are supported effectively and are able to make good progress from their starting points because their needs are identified quickly. Progress is monitored through the creation of effective individual education plans that are reviewed regularly.
- The most able make rapid progress because they are challenged well. Careful planning by staff creates a good understanding of every child so that they are challenged to reach their potential from the outset.
- Behaviour is good. Children are well supported to be safe and to come to understand how to keep safe.
- Provision is not yet outstanding because there is insufficient evaluation of staff practice, sustained through performance management and supervision, and leading to highly focused professional development. This would enable staff to develop their expertise even further.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Sixth form provision is a comparatively small but developing part of the school and all the independent school standards are met. Learners are supported well to reach their full potential and then to make positive decisions about next steps supported by effective careers advice and guidance. There are extremely high retention rates.
- Rigorous monitoring, both formal and informal, leads to careful tracking of progress and enables teachers to challenge learners to fulfil their potential. When progress is not as good as expected, support is put in place to enable ground to be made up. Positive advice informs the initial choice of subjects and continues through the sixth form, leading to careful decisions about higher education or advanced apprenticeships.

- Learners regularly attain strong results and fulfil their potential to a high extent. The 2015 cohort saw 100% obtain success in their A-level examinations, with 60% obtaining grades A or B.
- Learners are very well taught by subject specialists and develop a good understanding of and enthusiasm for their chosen subjects. They make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding. Care is taken to ensure that if any fall behind they are given good support to enable them to catch up. At the same time the most able are challenged to ensure that they fulfil their potential.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. Their behaviour is mature and they willingly take on additional responsibilities around the school. The development of good personal, social and employability skills sees them becoming positive members of the school and wider society.
- The need for more effective appraisal of sixth form staff by school leaders and the lack of annual professional objectives are currently reducing the overall effectiveness of sixth form provision.

School details

Unique reference number	113562
Inspection number	10006072
DfE registration number	876/6001

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Preparatory, senior and sixth form day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Diane Stoneman
Headteacher	Diane Stoneman
Annual fees	£6,381–£10,497
Telephone number	01392 273387
Website	www.bramdeanschool.co.uk
Email address	info@bramdeanschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 December 2012

Information about this school

- Bramdean is a non-selective independent day school situated in Exeter. Founded in 1901, it provides education for pupils between the ages of 3 and 18 years.
- Of the current 115 pupils, the vast majority are of White British background. A small number speak English as an additional language.
- The number of pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is very small.
- The school currently has no pupils who are disadvantaged (pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after).
- Children in the early years are taught in the kindergarten, which covers the Nursery Year through to Year 1. Three-year-olds generally attend part time, but from Reception they become full time. None are eligible for government funding for three- and four-year-olds.
- Sixth form learners have generally been at the school throughout their school lives and most go on to attend university.
- The school was last inspected in 2012. It was the subject of an emergency inspection in 2013 which found that elements of the independent school regulations were not fully met. A subsequent monitoring visit in 2014 found that the school was once again fully compliant.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for any of its pupils, and does not generally enter pupils early for external examinations.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice. Teaching and learning were observed in 14 lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher/proprietor, key subject and phase leaders, and the special educational needs coordinator.
- The views of parents were gathered from the 24 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and from a letter received.
- The inspectors talked to pupils throughout the inspection. Formal meetings were held with a representative group of younger pupils and, separately, with an older group to ensure that their views were also taken fully into account. Pupils' work was looked at in lessons, samples of work from across the school were looked at in detail and some pupils read to an inspector. Case studies enabled inspectors to gain a picture of wider support and provision made for pupils.
- The views of staff were gathered from their responses to the staff questionnaire and from discussions throughout the inspection.
- The inspection checked for compliance with the independent school regulations. Inspectors checked a range of documentation, including information on pupils' progress, planning and assessment information, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

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Roger Garrett

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