

Beacon Hill School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134767
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	381736
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2012
Lead inspector	Charles Hackett

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Fish
Headteacher	Richard Milligan
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2009
School address	Erriff Drive South Ockendon Romford RM15 5AY
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Charles Hackett

Additional inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 10 lessons involving 10 teachers, and undertook a learning walk of the main school site. Meetings were held with staff and three members of the governing body. Discussions were held with pupils about their work and views of the school and several pupils read to an inspector.

Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work and information on their progress; safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires completed by 16 parents and carers, 45 staff and 31 pupils were scrutinised.

Information about the school

Beacon Hill is a smaller than average special school. It caters for pupils with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have significant medical conditions, some of which are life limiting. The school has two sites, the main school site for pupils aged 3 to 16 and a new purpose-built site for its sixth form. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is close to the national average. Only a very small number of pupils admitted are in the care of a local authority. The school has specialist status for sensory and physical needs. It has achieved many awards for its work, the most recent being to be accredited as one of only 11 schools to receive a European 'Move' citation, a specialist physical programme for pupils with significant physical difficulties. The school opened seven years ago after the merger of two former special schools. It is due to become an academy from September 1, 2012.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Beacon Hill is outstanding school. Its excellent practices reflect the very high aspirations staff have for pupils' achievement. The personalised curriculum offered ensures that pupils' care needs are fully addressed alongside very high quality specialist teaching. The sixth form is outstanding and prepares students for life when they leave school very effectively.
- Pupils achieve extremely well in a wide range of subjects and aspects of their development. Achievements range from those with the most profound difficulties being able to shift their gaze to follow a light, to the pupils in the school's gifted and talented group reading a selection of books.
- Teaching is of a very high standard throughout the school. Teachers plan lessons very carefully to enable all pupils to make progress from their different starting points. Accurate and robust assessment of pupils' achievements enables staff to plot their progress and be in a position to challenge them appropriately to achieve even more.
- Pupils make their own unique contribution to the school's excellent safe and thriving learning environment through their positive engagement with staff. They thoroughly enjoy being in school and their behaviour in and out of class is excellent. Staff ensure that pupils are safe at all times but are equally highly proficient at being able to step back to encourage pupils to be as independent as possible. Pupils' spiritual development is very strongly promoted, as shown by the excellent care and support given to pupils to help them understand and celebrate the life of a recently deceased fellow pupil.
- The management of the school's performance management is extremely rigorous and has seen the development of highly specialised skills across the entire staff team. Senior leaders have successfully pursued their goal of excellence in teaching through rigorous monitoring, coaching and extensive training opportunities. The plans for the move to academy status are well under

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way, although currently the number of established partnerships is small.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Before the start of the next academic year, extend the range of partnerships the school has with the wider community to increase the support available for the school and develop further dimensions to its work.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The achievement of pupils, including those in the sixth form and the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding. Parents and carers fully agree with this judgement. Pupils with the most profound learning difficulties make outstanding progress in connecting with the environment around them. In a lesson where the teacher was reading a story using a range of props, one pupil met his target of tracking the movement of an object from left to right, while another progressed to trying to use both hands to touch tissue and foil to experience their different textures. In the sixth form, a pupil proudly showed a video clip of his work experience in a cafe where he was helping to make a cake and serving customers their cappuccinos. Another video showed the excellent progress of a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage over the six months he has been in school. The child initially ignored everyone around him but is now sharing toys with others and has progressed from making marks with paint on his hands to using a pencil to make a mark on paper.

Those students with the capacity to read make very good progress. Within the school's gifted and talented secondary group, pupils were seen extending their understanding of letter sounds, one sounding out initial letter sounds to help him read one syllable words. Another pupil had progressed to reading short sentences and putting in the missing word to sentences such as 'Jack can swim'. In the sixth form a pupil using a tablet computer read an interactive story of Tintin, successfully manipulating the screen to create her own variations to the story. Pupils make very good progress in physical activities. In a swimming lesson all pupils achieved their targets, which ranged from floating on their stomach to swimming a width of the pool.

The attainment of pupils, including in reading, is well below the national average which is understandable given their complex needs. An excellent set of data on the progress of pupils clearly demonstrate that most pupils achieve expected rates of progress, while many exceed these. The achievements of the different groups within the school are very similar, with boys and girls progressing at similar rates. The very small number of pupils in the care of the local authority make the same very good progress as other pupils.

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Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and pupils are accurate in their view that teaching is very effective throughout the school, including in the sixth form. Teachers make excellent use of information gained from assessing and tracking each pupil's progress to set challenging learning targets throughout the curriculum. They focus very closely on enabling pupils to make even the smallest steps of progress. In a primary lesson, the three pupils all made excellent progress because of the detailed and highly effective targets set for them. One used a symbolic communication system to make a choice as to the snack he wanted, another signed he wanted a biscuit, while the third showed previously unseen independent finger movement to touch an object.

A real strength of teaching throughout the curriculum is the determination teachers and teaching assistants have to enable pupils to make progress. This often means that pupils' physical and medical needs are attended to in class while they continue learning. In a lesson for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1, the teaching assistants supported learning during the activities with the use of props for a story, as well as addressing the feeding and therapy needs of the pupils.

Teaching assistants are familiar with the learning objectives for each activity and work independently with pupils on set tasks. All staff have very positive relationships with pupils and communicate with them constantly. For example, when moving a pupil around the school, staff were frequently heard describing where they were going and what direction they were about to take. The very secure relationships between staff and pupils, together with the highly effective planned curriculum, create a highly positive learning environment within the school. This does much to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour over time and safety of pupils are outstanding. Parents and carers fully recognise this, being very appreciative of the high quality of care and support provided at the school. Pupils clearly enjoy the company of their classmates and show considerable respect and consideration towards each other in lessons and around the school. Non-verbal pupils with the most profound difficulties make excellent progress in recognising other pupils. For example, in an information and communication technology lesson, a pupil made excellent progress in using his communication switch to say goodbye to his peers as he was leaving. Ambulant pupils are very aware of their peers in wheelchairs or standing frames, and proceed with considerable care around them.

Staff use their excellent knowledge of pupils' disabilities and learning difficulties to good effect in the management of pupils' behaviour. They recognise that the behaviour of pupils is often their means of communicating their needs. They use specialist proactive strategies to interpret the actions of each pupil to help them

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respond in a safe and appropriate manner. For example, when a pupil using a computer was banging his mouse, the teacher knew that the issue was about the pupil trying to say that the computer was not responding rather than the pupil deliberately demonstrating poor behaviour.

There are no concerns with regard to bullying within the school. Occasionally pupils need staff support to respond to adults or peers appropriately or to understand how others are trying to communicate with them. Internet security is taken very seriously to ensure that pupils are not exposed to any risks in their use of computers and other devices. The attendance of most pupils is above average but for some pupils it is affected by their significant medical needs.

Leadership and management

Central to the school's success is the drive and determination of senior staff, and the governing body, in their pursuit of excellence. The school has continued to develop and grow since its previous inspection. The senior team of headteacher and his two deputies work extremely well together, bringing considerable rigour to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance. Very effective work has been done to bring improvements to the quality of teaching. The focus has been on what makes teaching outstanding and very effective training opportunities have been provided to staff to meet this goal. These improvements and the high quality of development planning show clearly that the school has an outstanding capacity to sustain its development even further.

The school's curriculum is highly effective because it is personalised to meet the needs and aspirations of each pupil. For example, Year 9 pupils make high quality videos of their achievements, which are shown at their personal reviews. Destination routes are established and each pupil's timetable from Year 10 onwards is focused on meeting their interests and future aspirations. This excellent personalised approach, coupled with the in-depth knowledge staff have on each student, ensures that equality of opportunity is guaranteed and eliminates any possibility of any form of discrimination. The school acknowledges, though, that few partnerships exist with the local community that could enhance its work even further. The curriculum contributes very well to the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the activities in and out of school that students can participate in and the positive learning environment created on both sites. Very high quality bereavement support demonstrates the excellent skills staff have developed in this area.

The governing body makes a very strong contribution to the effectiveness of the school. It carries out its duties extremely diligently, making regular visits and holding meetings with individual staff to help them increase their understanding of the school. This gives them a solid base to be in a position to monitor and challenge the quality of its work. Together with senior staff, governors put a strong focus on safeguarding and this ensures that all pupils and staff are safe and secure in the school.

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Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Hill School, South Ockendon, RM15 5AY

Thank you for your kindness when Joanna and I visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting so many of you and looking at your work, especially those of you who brought the display of their work to our room. I know a lot more about the Greeks and Romans now. You will not be surprised to know that we have agreed with you and judged the school to be outstanding.

We consider both your achievements and the quality of teaching to be excellent. The success so many of you have in improving your communication is great to see. We also judge that your behaviour and safety, and your spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, to all be outstanding.

The school continues to improve from when it first opened and its last inspection. Much of this is due to the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, his senior colleagues and the governing body. It is clear that all the staff work really well together and are keen to enable you all to achieve as much as possible. It is difficult to know what the school can do to be even better but we have asked staff and governing body to increase the number of partners the school has to see what extra help and support they can add to what the school already provides.

Once again, thank you for making our job so enjoyable when we came to visit. Keep doing your bit to help the school by working hard and making your own observations via the school council.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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