

Beechwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110076
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	356684
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	854
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Rowley
Headteacher	Julia Shepard
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
School address	Long Readings Lane Slough SL2 1QE
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 30 teachers in 30 lessons. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body, the School Improvement Partner and groups of students. A telephone conversation was held with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors looked at policies, analyses of data, the school's self-evaluation, the governing body minutes, and 87 questionnaires completed by parents and carers. They also looked at questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Whether the level of attainment achieved in 2010 examination results is being sustained and improved for current cohorts.
- Whether teaching and other provision secure good progress for all groups of learners.
- The quality of personal outcomes for students.
- The quality of outcomes for different courses in the sixth form.
- The extent of remaining variability in the quality of learning across the curriculum and whether this is related to the quality of leadership. The extent of remaining variability in the quality of learning across the curriculum and whether this is related to the quality of leadership.

Information about the school

Beechwood School is a smaller-than-average community school in a local authority which operates a selective secondary system. Consequently, attainment on entry is below average. The majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Asian British heritage, representing approximately 20% of the school roll. Approximately half of the students speak English as an additional language, with a small number at the early stages of English language acquisition. An on-site assessment centre analyses and identifies the needs of students arriving in Slough from abroad. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is more than twice the national average. The school has gained several awards including Eco-Schools, Healthy Schools and Sportsmark.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Beechwood School's overall effectiveness is good. Areas of the school's work, including exceptional care, guidance and support, are outstanding. The school has strongly improved all areas of its work over time. Students' achievement is good and the school recently achieved its best ever GCSE examination results. Forty-two per cent of students achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, compared to 25% in 2009. The proportion of students attaining five good GCSE grades increased from 68% to 94%. Progress and achievement in the sixth form are good, particularly in the vocational courses in which the sixth form specialises. Staff morale is very high and there is a palpable commitment to driving improvement. This has been achieved by the headteacher's determined leadership. Together with her leadership team, she has provided a clear focus on securing the best outcomes for students. This has led, over time, to the school being very well regarded by parents and carers.

- Raising aspiration and hence attainment for the local community is the mission of the school. Inclusion is a key objective and those students facing challenging circumstances, including members of the diamond group, are glowing in their praise of the support they receive. One student succinctly represented the view of many others by reporting that 'the school will do everything to help us' at Beechwood. Excellent pastoral care is the norm for any student experiencing difficulties. As a result, all groups of students report that they feel exceptionally safe in school.
- Target setting is very challenging. Leaders and managers constantly revise targets upwards as previous ones are exceeded. There is a very clear understanding of how well students are doing due to rigorous systems to assess, monitor and track students' progress. Leaders are able to respond quickly to support any students who fall behind. Due to this careful monitoring and decisive action, differences in achievement between groups of learners are rare and swiftly closed.
- Overall, progress is good for students, being faster in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. This is because, in Key Stage 4, good progress in lessons is built upon by a range of intervention strategies that accelerates the achievement of students. Highly tailored individual support is available to any student who needs it. This results in those with special educational needs and/or disabilities making outstanding progress.
- The school is a very harmonious place and students from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds behave considerately towards each other. Students are given a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community; these, they gladly accept.
- The curriculum is carefully designed for the range of students at Beechwood and meets their needs well. For older students, the curriculum is personalised to offer a

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wide range of vocational courses. This makes a significant contribution to the number of accredited qualifications with which students leave school. The excellent facilities at the school, including a swimming pool, are well utilised to provide a much appreciated and extensive extra-curricular programme.

The headteacher and her team are always ambitious for their students. They recognise that, while certain areas of the school's work are outstanding, there are further improvements that could be made.

- Overall, teaching is good. Where it is less successful, this is usually due to assessment information not being used well enough to plan challenging activities for the full range of learners in a class. In a minority of lessons where this is the case, opportunities are missed to develop students' learning and thinking skills through suitably challenging activities which encourage working together to solve problems.
- Written feedback is not as consistently effective as verbal feedback in improving students' learning and progress. This is either because it does not give clear guidance for improvement or because students are not compelled to act on advice when given.
- Self-evaluation is rigorous and has led to significant improvements in the quality of provision and achievement. However, it does not always sharply analyse the impact of provision on outcomes. This means that, for example, some curriculum leaders find it difficult to identify the key areas for development in teaching to further accelerate learners' progress.

The improvement in outcomes over time, coupled to improvements in teaching since the last inspection and continuing excellence in care, guidance and support, demonstrates the school's good capacity to further improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further accelerate progress across the curriculum through securing good and better learning in lessons, particularly for the more-able, by:
 - consistently focusing curriculum leaders' self-evaluation and improvement planning on the quality of teaching and learning in their areas
 - ensuring teachers consistently use assessment information to plan challenging learning activities for the full range of student abilities
 - extending opportunities to develop students' skills as independent learners by increasing opportunities for working together to solve challenging problems
 - ensuring that teachers' marking has a clear rationale to facilitate faster progress by students and is completed to a consistently high standard. ensuring that teachers' marking has a clear rationale to facilitate faster progress by students and is completed to a consistently high standard.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students make rapid progress where they are given engaging and challenging learning activities which provide opportunities for teamworking and time for reflection. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, students worked very well in ability groups to

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develop answers to GCSE examination questions and then reflected on and shared their understanding between groups. When teachers talk for too long or tasks are less well targeted at the range of abilities, students can become too passive and lose focus on the learning.

Students' progress over time is good overall. The most recent Year 11 cohort showed excellent progress for lower- and middle-ability students and good progress for the smaller more-able group. The school has recognised the need to secure faster progress for the more-able and is working to support this group through increased challenge in lessons. Progress is more rapid in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 due to enhanced curriculum options and increased intervention. The school is aware of this and is working to embed the learning and thinking skills prevalent and effective in Key Stage 3 intervention work in the mainstream curriculum.

The school has worked hard, using a range of strategies, to improve attendance with the result that attendance has risen gently over time and is now broadly average. A good work-related curriculum, coupled to effective cross-curricular provision in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) results in good preparation for students' future economic well-being.

Students say that poor behaviour is rare and that good relationships with staff that care for them are common. Inspectors saw consistently good behaviour in lessons and observed polite and thoughtful behaviour around the school.

Students clearly enjoy coming to school. Students get on very well together and report that racist incidents are rare. Bullying happens 'only occasionally' and students are very confident that it will be dealt with robustly and effectively by staff if it does occur.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding due to a culture of mutual respect and understanding of others that exists in the school.

Students at the early stages of learning English benefit from excellent specialist support. This initially secures excellent gains in developing basic skills and, over time, leads to progress in line with their peers. Due to the excellent support and intervention work they receive, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress regardless of need.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Most teaching is good. Teachers have very good relationships with students and know them well. They use their good subject knowledge to plan appropriate tasks for learners. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to structure learning and provide visual clues to learners which help them focus on the task and contributes to their good progress. Generally, other adults supporting in the classroom are well briefed by teachers. They make a significant contribution to the quality of learning for those they are helping. In the best lessons, sharp use of assessment data allows teachers to plan challenging individual and group activities to meet the needs of all students. However, this is not universally the case and, in a small number of lessons, students work on the same task regardless of ability. This, most commonly, results in a lack of challenge for the most-able.

Teachers generally use questioning well to assess students' understanding and reshape tasks. Oral feedback is good. Written feedback is more variable and, although conscientiously completed, sometimes fails to provide clear guidance for improvement. Students find the increasing use of peer- and self- assessment useful. For example, in a Year 8 drama lesson, students enjoyed working in groups to develop a sketch from 'A Christmas Carol'. Time to peer-assess performances allowed students to make good progress in their understanding and refine their sketches.

The curriculum is increasingly personalised in Key Stage 4 with a broad range of vocational pathways. The school is currently working to embed learning and thinking skills

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used with nurture and intervention groups in the 'learners' toolbox' in the mainstream Key Stage 3 curriculum. Enrichment opportunities are extensive and use the impressive facilities available in the well-designed school very well. These have a high take-up across the student population, and are much enjoyed. Cross-curricular provision, including literacy, numeracy and ICT, is well targeted and effectively supports students' basic skill development.

The school is grounded in its community and has an impressive knowledge of its learners and their families. The school works very well with feeder primaries to aid transition and identify students in need of intervention early. The on-site assessment centre is very effective in identifying the needs of students arriving from abroad and these are quickly addressed for those admitted to the school. This very well-targeted support for all students enables them to make the best of the opportunities provided by the school and almost all leave the school with accreditation as a result. Partnership working is extensive and an integral part of provision. Initiatives like the on-site policeman help break down barriers and allow students who face challenging circumstances to feel very safe and well supported.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The inspirational headteacher works closely and very effectively with her leadership team and the governing body to achieve the best possible school for the local community. This has resulted in an impressive school building and increasingly good outcomes for the student body. Staff at all levels share the headteacher's determination to secure outstanding achievement for all groups of students. This has resulted in the development of a good sixth form, refinements to the curriculum, excellent inclusion work and improvements in teaching and learning over time.

Following the last inspection, the school introduced a more rigorous process of self-evaluation. This allows leaders at all levels to analyse their provision carefully and understand strengths and weaknesses. However, curriculum leaders do not always focus sharply, in their evaluations, on how teaching could be improved to deliver faster progress in lessons. Consequently, lesson planning does not always utilise the wealth of assessment data to plan for the full range of abilities.

Senior leaders have a very secure understanding of the quality and consistency of teaching in the school through regular, accurate observation. Turbulence in staffing and recruitment difficulties in the local area have been addressed by carefully targeted staff training. This has allowed the school to develop its own teaching staff through helping

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them gain degrees and teaching qualification while improving the practice of existing staff. However, the school is aware that there is still some scope to increase the proportion of good and better practice.

Members of the governing body are well informed and play an effective role in supporting the school, while holding leaders and managers to account.

School leaders are very alert to any variation in achievement between different groups of learners. They quickly employ strategies to promote equality of opportunity and these are highly effective. There is no evidence of discrimination in the school.

The school has a very safe site and has adopted good practice in safeguarding across all areas of its work.

The school is rooted in its own community. Global links are well established and effective strategies are in place to celebrate the rich diversity of the school and local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form has been developed with a clear rationale to offer provision that is not available at other institutions in the local area. Careful liaison between sixth form leaders and higher education establishments while developing courses means that curriculum combinations allow access to higher education.

The current offer is mainly vocational with a small number of A-level courses. Students' progress and outcomes are good. Teachers' successful experience of vocational courses in the main school has been continued into the sixth form. Good teaching, as exemplified in a business studies lesson, carefully balances support to achieve grade criteria with the challenge of independent learning through research.

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Over the two-year history of the sixth form, progress and attainment have been better on vocational courses than in A levels. Sixth form leaders are aware of this and, through challenging targets and improved teaching, are achieving faster progress for the small number of current A-level students.

Very good relationships between staff and students are an extension of those in the main school. Students feel strongly supported and, as a result, retention is good with most students successfully completing their studies. Good quality academic guidance, coupled to appropriate course combinations, has led to most students who wish to, successfully entering higher education.

Facilities are very good in the sixth form and the taught curriculum is supplemented by a good enrichment programme. This is well received by students.

Sixth form leaders have demonstrated a clear approach to growing this aspect of the school's work. Leaders have been effective in planning and delivering a sixth form that functions well in two years. They are aware of the need to benchmark students' performance and are beginning to do so. They are also keeping the relatively narrow curriculum offer carefully under review to ensure that it best meets the needs of future students as attainment rises in the main school.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost all parents and carers who responded are very happy with the school. They generally agree with all statements on the questionnaire. A few think that the school does not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle, that their suggestions and concerns are not taken account of, or that school does not keep them informed about progress. However, inspectors found during this inspection that the school provides many ways to encourage physical exercise, supports the development of emotional and sexual health well, and ensures healthy lunch options are available. As a result, students have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. The school also meets requirements in keeping parents and carers informed about progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Beechwood School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 854 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	38	52	60	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	34	39	51	59	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	33	47	54	8	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	28	57	66	0	0	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	32	37	52	60	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	29	55	63	7	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	22	59	68	6	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	29	33	48	55	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	29	53	61	2	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	33	54	62	3	3	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	18	57	66	7	8	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	28	32	58	67	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	39	48	55	3	3	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



13 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Beechwood School, Slough SL2 1QE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to inspectors when we recently visited your school. Here are our main inspection findings.

- Your school is good. Overall, students make good progress in their learning and, for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, progress is outstanding.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school looks after you exceptionally well. As a result, you feel extremely safe, are able to contribute very well to the school and local community, and develop excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- The curriculum is good and constantly under review. This ensures that you can choose courses which meet your needs well; this is increasingly helping you to attain good qualifications.
- The school is excellent at monitoring your progress carefully to ensure that extra help is provided should you fall behind your challenging targets.
- Those of you learning English for the first time receive excellent specialist support to help improve your skills.
- You behave well in lessons, normally concentrating hard, and you behave very well towards each other around the site.
- The new sixth form is good and providing an increasing number of you with an appropriate route to higher education.

To help ensure that all groups consistently make outstanding progress throughout their school career, we have asked staff to improve on the good quality teaching you receive by:

- making sure that lessons are always closely matched to your different abilities, challenging you, and aiding your development as independent learners, and that written feedback helps your progress
- leaders at all levels sharply focusing self-evaluation and improvement planning on the quality of classroom teaching.

All of you can help by always being in school when you are able, focusing strongly on your learning in class, and responding to teachers' comments on your work.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector

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