

The Beacon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125306
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	359883
Inspection dates	28–29 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Tom Winskill

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1130
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	143
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Gladys Spedding
Headteacher	Ms Lisa Croke
Date of previous school inspection	6 November 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 36 lessons or part-lessons involving 35 teachers and held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's monitoring records, planning documents, policies, and 147 parental questionnaires.

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

- How well teaching meets the needs of groups and individuals with different learning needs so that all can make good progress.
- The extent to which students are able to develop and practise their literacy skills in different subjects.
- The effectiveness of the arrangements for improving attendance and supporting students with special educational needs and/or disabilities who may be at risk of exclusion.
- The effectiveness of different levels of leadership and management, including the leadership and management of the sixth form.

Information about the school

The school is slightly larger than average in size and serves the residential area around Banstead in Surrey. Although the school takes students from adjacent London boroughs, the proportion of its students who live locally is increasing. It has specialist status in media arts. Most of the students are of White British heritage, with around 18 per cent from a range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The headteacher joined the school in September 2010.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a satisfactory and improving school. In both the main school and sixth form, leaders and managers have improved the quality of the curriculum so that it meets the needs of a wider range of students, and are bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching. As a result, standards of attainment are continuing to rise and all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. The school provides good care, guidance and support and is particularly successful in working with parents and students to raise attendance, which is now above average. In addition, the care and support provided for some students in extremely challenging circumstances are exemplary. The arrangements for safeguarding students are outstanding. As a result, Beacon School students are clear that they feel safe in school.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The proportion of good and better lessons is rising, although not enough teachers consistently teach at this level. In too many lessons, all students have to work at the same speed and do the same activities, regardless of their differing ability levels or learning needs. The school recognises the weakness in students' literacy skills and has begun to develop a whole-school approach to improving literacy levels. This is applied inconsistently in lessons and as a result, there are too few opportunities for students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to improve their writing skills. Students behave well around the school and in lessons. Where teaching is good, their behaviour is sometimes outstanding.

Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Students' attainment and progress are monitored assiduously, as is the quality of teaching. The information gathered is used effectively to plan for improvement and focus sharply on tackling weaknesses, particularly in teaching and learning. The improvements in important areas such as GCSE and A-level examination results reflect the increasing effectiveness of the school's systems for development planning, and it is well placed to continue this upward trend.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that learning and progress are good or better in 80% of lessons, with none inadequate, by July 2011 in order to raise attainment further, by ensuring that:
 - the existing best practice is shared more fully across the school

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- learning activities meet the needs of students with different abilities, and in particular provide more challenging tasks for the most able students in each teaching group.
- Develop the students' literacy skills by:
 - ensuring strategies to enable students to develop and practise a range of literacy skills, particularly in developing their extended writing, are applied consistently
 - ensuring that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given sufficient support to improve their writing skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students are generally attentive and keen to succeed, responding well to activities which make them think and push them to extend their learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, students were encouraged to find their own solutions to a problem and this helped to improve their understanding of the mathematical concept they were studying. However, where teaching does not capture their interest, they lose concentration and are less focused on their work. Students often work well with each other when given the opportunity. For example, in a music lesson, students encouraged each other to participate and some demonstrated good leadership skills by ensuring all members of their group had an opportunity to play and perform.

Achievement overall is satisfactory as students' standards of attainment on entry, as shown by their Key Stage 2 test results, were broadly average and they go on to gain GCSE examination results in line with national averages. Learning and progress are improving so that in some areas, such as in science in Key Stage 3, achievement is now good. Students are confident that they learn a lot in lessons and 90 per cent of those who completed the Ofsted questionnaire indicated that they enjoy school. Enrichment activities, including those provided through the school's specialist subjects, such as taking part in drama performances and singing in the choir, contribute to the students' positive picture of the school.

An important feature of the improved attendance is the sustained reduction in recent years of the number of students who are persistently absent. Students have a good understanding of their options at ages 14, 16 and 18. After completing their compulsory education at the Beacon School, the proportion of 16-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training is below the local authority and national averages. Students' information and communication technology skills are good but weaknesses in their application of literacy limit the development of the full range of skills needed in the workplace and in further education. For example, the application of literacy in many lessons observed involved little more than ensuring that students' understood the meaning and use of technical words used in that particular subject.

Students appreciate the healthy choices provided by the school canteen and an increasing number of students cycle to school. They are aware of a range of potential threats to their health and safety, for example though inappropriate use of the internet. Students have good opportunities to reflect on a range of spiritual and moral issues in subjects such as religious studies and geography. Students were able to reflect in depth on the theme of 'courage' through examples presented in an assembly and from their own personal standpoint.

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Students from different heritages mix well and they understand the issues of living in a multifaith and multicultural society. They particularly enjoyed the range of activities in the 'Africa' theme week run by the school to raise awareness of different cultures and ways of life. Racial incidents are rare and the school takes appropriate action to deal with them. Where relevant, the school modifies the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme to tackle the wider issues raised by individual incidents. Students are involved with local and international charities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and their evident enthusiasm helps to engage the students' interest. Teachers pitch learning activities at broadly the right level for their classes, which leads to students making satisfactory progress. Where the work is sufficiently challenging for the whole class and proceeds at a good pace, then students make good progress. However, even in these lessons, teachers do not always stretch fully those students who are clearly demonstrating higher levels of knowledge and understanding. As a result, opportunities for students to make outstanding progress are lost.

In lessons, teachers regularly check the progress made by groups and individuals and work effectively to ensure that learning is secure. In some lessons, tasks are modified so that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities can make good progress,

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but this is the exception rather than the rule. It is rare that teachers provide activities specifically designed to help different groups and individuals make good or better progress.

Regular assessment of students' work ensures that they are aware of how well they are doing. Feedback to students is often too general and does not indicate the subject-specific improvements required to raise the standard of work. Teaching assistants are deployed well, giving effective support not only to those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities but also to other students needing help.

The curriculum is regularly reviewed by senior and middle leaders and is increasingly modified to meet the needs of different groups of students. For example, in music and physical education, different options are available in Key Stage 4 to meet students' different requirements. A range of different courses are provided in partnership with local further education colleges. Some of these courses reflect demand in the construction and service industries, which are large employers locally. Subjects related to the school's media arts specialist status, such as music technology and media, broaden the curriculum available. Courses introduced at Key Stage 4 in conjunction with new courses started or planned for the sixth form are improving the routes available to students moving through the 14 to 19 phase of their education.

Students are well cared for and supported throughout the school. Students and parents recognise the good work done to help Year 7 students settle quickly and confidently into secondary school. Good quality information, advice and guidance are provided for students making decisions about subject options at age 14, and for 16-year-olds deciding on what is best for their future in terms of education, training and employment at the end of Key Stage 4. Effective measures to improve attendance are based on rigorous monitoring of the attendance of groups and individuals. High levels of attendance are rewarded and celebrated. Where necessary, there is a tenacious and persistent approach to communicating with parents about the need for students to attend school regularly and on time. Action taken by the school is helping to reduce fixed term exclusions, including exclusions for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Permanent exclusions are rare, reflecting the students' good behaviour and the school's stated intent to help all students in their learning. However, a minority of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire indicated that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour.

The school makes good use of external agencies to support potentially vulnerable students. However, the student development centre is underused. Opportunities are missed to use this resource to provide further support for learning, including the development of literacy skills.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior staff work well with subject leaders and year heads to promote improvement based on regular monitoring and tracking of individual students' performance in different year groups and in different subjects. Consequently, staff are clear about what the school is trying to achieve and are committed to bringing about further improvement. Lines of accountability are clear, including the effective way in which the governing body carries out its responsibilities and holds the school to account. Where performance is weak, support measures through a range of professional development opportunities using expertise in the school and from other schools are set in train. These are accompanied by rigorous monitoring to ensure improvements are taking place. As a result, the quality of subject leadership, the skills of year heads and teaching and learning are improving, although a few pockets of weaker or inconsistent practice remain.

The governing body and senior staff are committed to developing an inclusive school serving the local community. Parents are rightly gaining confidence in the school, based on the improvements made in recent years. The steps taken to promote community cohesion are effective as the school has a good understanding of its local community and seeks to help students understand local and wider community issues. The school has clear policies on gender, race and disability although the action plans to guide the implementation of these policies lack clarity. The school has a good understanding of the performance and well-being of different groups of students. It often responds well to particular needs. For example, traveller students receive support to help with their education when they are not at school. However, the achievement of different groups of students remains only satisfactory. The school uses the expertise built up in its high-quality safeguarding procedures to support other schools in developing their own safeguarding arrangements.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Recent improvements in the performance of a range of subjects in the sixth form mean that sixth form students now make satisfactory progress. Those on A-level courses attain pass rates in line with the national average. Improvements have taken place as a result of concerted action by the school, successfully focusing on subjects where there was poor performance.

The quality of sixth form teaching seen varied from satisfactory to outstanding. For example, in an outstanding media lesson, excellent planning and organisation of groups enabled the students to make rapid progress in acquiring knowledge and new skills, which the students enjoyed a great deal. Much of the learning was active, with teacher exposition limited to a short introduction and explanation of the activities. Activities were planned to meet the needs of talented students and those less confident. Some sixth form teaching, however, lacks such variation and imagination.

The curriculum is now offering courses better suited to the wide prior attainment and aptitudes of students joining the sixth form. Students receive good personal support and guidance. In 2010, all Year 13 leavers went on to higher education, employment or a gap year. Senior leaders and managers are aware of the relatively high costs of running the sixth form and have begun to take steps to make it more efficient. Leaders and managers are clear about how to sustain and build on the recent improvements in performance in the sixth form.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The responses to the Ofsted questionnaire indicated a good level of satisfaction with, and support for, the school. A minority of parents and carers who responded felt that aspects of communication between the school and parents could be improved. Inspectors found that the school has regular well-attended parent-teacher consultations and well-established systems for communication with parents and carers, who can also join a parent focus group to provide responses to proposals made by the school and to raise issues for further consideration. The school gathers parents' and carers' views on a range of specific issues but it does not systematically collect their views about the work of the school as a whole. Several parents and carers who provided written comments on the questionnaire spoke highly of the improvements in much of the school's work over the last three years. Parents and carers of Year 7 students spoke highly of the school's successful efforts to ensure new students are made to feel welcome and settled in their new school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Beacon 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 147 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1130 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	66	45	77	52	4	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	65	44	72	49	3	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	50	34	68	46	10	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	29	76	52	10	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	33	22	91	62	4	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	28	71	48	14	10	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	20	87	59	16	11	2	1
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)	40	27	76	52	5	3	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	26	81	55	7	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	24	70	48	17	12	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	20	75	51	7	5	5	3
The school is led and managed effectively	47	32	72	49	4	3	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	62	42	68	46	6	4	2	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.



30 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Beacon School, Banstead SM7 1AG

Thank you for your friendly and helpful welcome during our recent inspection visit and for helping us with our work. We found that your school is satisfactory and improving. Exam results are rising and you are making satisfactory progress in your lessons. The teaching and learning we saw were satisfactory, with some good practice. You behaved well around the school and in lessons, especially when the teaching was good or better. In some lessons, you do not have enough opportunities to improve your skills in literacy, especially in writing.

You feel safe in school and you enjoy school. The school's curriculum is well planned to provide courses to suit different students. The school takes good care of you and has excellent procedures to ensure your safety. It provides good guidance and support. Your attendance is above the national average.

The headteacher and her staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are improving many areas of the school's work and have good plans to make further improvements. We have asked the headteacher and other staff to ensure that your learning and progress continue to improve by making sure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning is more consistently good
- lesson activities are more carefully planned so that students of all abilities are able to make good progress
- you are given more opportunities to develop your literacy skills and improve your writing.

You can do your bit to help by making sure you concentrate hard and keep trying to succeed even if the work set seems difficult.

Yours sincerely

Tom Winskill

Her Majesty's Inspector

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