

Beechfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117094
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358079
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Glenn Gibsone
Headteacher	Lisa Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 14 lessons taught by nine different members of staff. Inspectors held meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, with a representative of the local authority and with staff and pupils. They looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, teachers' lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's documentation which included records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Responses to inspection questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and by 112 parents and carers were also considered.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How rapidly and consistently do pupils make progress, both in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 to 6, particularly in reading and writing?
- How well do staff use assessment information to plan work which challenges all pupils to make good progress, particularly in English, for those who speak English as an additional language and for those identified as gifted or talented?
- How effective is the leadership of the school, particularly that of governors and subject leaders?

Information about the school

Beechfield Primary School is of similar size to most primary schools. Currently, it is in the early stages of expansion, so that, ultimately, there will be two classes in each year group. The school's intake reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area. Most pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups, but are primarily of Pakistani heritage. In recent years, the proportion of pupils from Eastern Europe has increased significantly. A high proportion of pupils are bilingual, with only a minority at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Most have specific learning difficulties or speech and language difficulties. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school shares its site with a Children's Centre which opened in May 2008 and operates independently of the school. This provision is the subject of a separate inspection.

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

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. However, it has significant strengths, particularly in the good provision it makes for pupils' personal development and well-being and for their pastoral support, especially for those pupils who enter the school with little or no English. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well. Pupils feel safe and have confidence in adults. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoy participating in sport. Pupils' contribution to the school as play leaders or house captains, or in undertaking daily tasks, is good. School leaders have been very successful in raising attendance. Consistently low in past years, attendance is now broadly average.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start and achieve well across the areas of learning. This positive momentum is largely sustained through Years 1 and 2. Pupils' progress and achievement in Years 3 to 6 have been more variable. However, overall attainment at the end of Year 6, low up to 2009, has improved to be broadly average. Intensive development in reading and writing this year is producing rapid progress and standards are rising. However, progress in mathematics and science is inconsistent though satisfactory overall; attainment is close to the expected level. Although there is some good teaching, the pace of lessons is sometimes rather slow and this constrains pupils' learning. Expectations of written work are not always high enough, given the commitment pupils demonstrate in lessons. The curriculum is satisfactory, with a major focus on literacy and numeracy skills and some opportunities for pupils to use their writing or mathematical skills in other subjects. However, while less attention has been given to science or to the other subjects, the school recognises the need to achieve a more balanced provision. The school is strengthening the role of recently appointed subject leaders and this provides the opportunity to raise the profile of their subjects within the curriculum.

Teachers use assessment information well in some lessons and pupils have a good understanding of what they need to achieve. However, marking, while generally thorough in writing, does not always give pupils enough guidance as to how they can improve their work in other subjects. Individual target setting is established and is having an increasing impact on pupils' satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, senior leaders know the school well and have already had an impact on past weaknesses around attainment and attendance. Self-evaluation is accurate. With some staff turnover, however, much depends on a few key leaders and the school recognises there is a need to strengthen middle management. The governing body has had a considerable change in membership, although key members have remained. Although their impact is satisfactory at present, governors are highly committed, as the school enters a period of expansion. The school's inherent strength as a community, the effectiveness of its work on reading and writing

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and on pupils' previously low attendance and its clearly articulated vision for improvement all indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils' progress in mathematics and science is at least as rapid and consistent as in reading and writing, so that standards are raised further.
- Increase the consistency of pupils' learning through:
 - - ensuring that lessons have a brisk pace and that no time is wasted
 - setting higher expectations of the quality of pupils' written work
 - providing more consistent guidance through marking as to what pupils must do to improve.
- Develop the monitoring role and accountability of subject leaders to ensure that the curriculum offers a broader and more balanced experience for pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although children's skills on joining the school have typically been below average, entry levels have begun to rise. With more consistent teaching and improved attendance, attainment has picked up, particularly in Year 6, though it is not yet as strong in mathematics and science as in English.

Given the high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, the school is committed to providing good access to quality spoken English, so that they can develop their skills and build confidence. This was a key strength of a Year 2 mathematics lesson where the teacher questioned pupils rigorously so that she could be sure that they understood the tasks set. Employing precise language around the use of tables in data-handling really focused pupils' thinking and gave them new confidence in their knowledge and in their ability to share information. A Year 6 science lesson, on the separation of solids from solutions, promoted good learning because of the good subject knowledge and effective management skills of the teacher, leading to good engagement by pupils. Again, the teacher's expectation that pupils would contribute orally led to an enthusiasm among pupils to be the first to offer answers, so extending their underlying language skills further. Open-ended opportunities to structure experiments also enabled pupils to develop their understanding. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress because provision is carefully-targeted to meet their needs.

Pupils' personal development is good. They respond well to challenges and work well co-operatively when given the opportunity. The school council offers pupils experience of the democratic process. Spiritual, social and moral development is good, although cultural aspects are less systematically developed. Pupils show great respect for each other and for staff and have good interpersonal skills. Average, but improving, basic skills mean that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for future study and later life.

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

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	3
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?

Teaching is satisfactory, with some good lessons observed Relationships are a strength. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and well prepared so that they can support individual pupils and groups of learners, particularly those at an early stage of learning English and occasionally those gifted and talented. Appropriate priority is given to clear, extended, high-quality speaking in lessons. In several lessons, pace was an issue. Pupils spent too long on the carpet, listening to the teacher. As a result, there was insufficient time for them to work independently. The school has focused recently on developing and embedding assessment practice and this has had a positive impact on the consistency and quality of pupils' learning, particularly in reading and writing. Occasionally, the 'steps for success' guidance is too detailed for pupils to use, particularly those who find learning more difficult. Marking is often thorough, providing pupils with guidance as to their next steps in learning. However, the good practice evident in writing is not always transferred to other subjects, where marking is often rather superficial. The school recognises that staff could have higher expectations of the quality of pupils' written work.

The curriculum gives pupils satisfactory learning opportunities. Pupils say that they enjoy their learning. The school has been working to ensure that provision is more balanced. However, significant time is allocated to English and mathematics. This leaves a limited time for the other subjects. As a result, pupils' opportunities are constrained. Even in science, provision is patchy across the school. There is limited evidence of the use of

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information and communication technology to enhance learning in other subjects, although the school is working to develop this across the curriculum. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is carefully planned. External partnerships, including links with the schools' sports partnership, contribute well to extending pupils' learning. However, enrichment activities to support provision for gifted and talented pupils are limited. Extra-curricular provision is satisfactory.

Staff are highly responsive to pupils' needs. Transition arrangements are good, particularly in supporting pupils identified as vulnerable. The school works closely with support agencies. There is good practice, effectively managed by the learning mentor, in supporting the health, social and behavioural needs of pupils in challenging circumstances. The school counsellor offers high quality support for pupils, parents and carers with social or emotional needs. Informal before-school care provides well for the small group of pupils who arrive at school early each morning.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a very close knowledge of the community which the school serves and sets high standards for all aspects of the school's work. Her effective leadership has supported significant progress in the last two years. School development planning accurately identifies the key priorities for the school. Staff morale is high. Currently, however, other than in literacy, most subject leaders are relatively new and are not yet having a sufficient impact on learning. Robust systems are now in place to track pupils' progress and assessment practice is becoming more systematic. The monitoring of teaching and learning is increasingly effective, so ensuring that all teaching is at least satisfactory.

Governance is satisfactory. The membership of the governing body has undergone significant changes recently. The Chair and Vice-Chair know the school well. Newer members bring good, relevant outside experience and are determined to support the school as it moves forward. They closely monitor its performance and are beginning to provide more rigorous challenge and hold the school to account. They are increasingly involved in school self-evaluation.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Documentation and staff training are thorough and governors are well-informed on safeguarding issues. Discrimination is tackled effectively and the promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory and improving. Partnerships are good. Good links with support agencies have had a positive impact on the progress of the most vulnerable pupils, and contribute well to the satisfactory progress made by pupils

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with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The governing body ensures that community cohesion is satisfactorily promoted. Pupils learn about other faiths and communities, locally and globally, through the curriculum. There are close bonds with the main local ethnic groups and the school is internally very harmonious. Governors recognise, however, that, despite recent involvement with Global Gateway, international links and the school's engagement with local area issues could both be developed further.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Until recently, a significant number of children who joined the school in Nursery did not continue to Reception. Others entered the Reception class directly. As the school increases its intake, the entry pattern is changing, with more Nursery children staying on for Reception. In addition, children are coming from areas with different social characteristics. Typically, children's skills and knowledge on entry have been below average, particularly in most aspects of communication, language and literacy. However, in 2009 and 2010, children entered at a slightly higher level and this is contributing to improving outcomes at the end of Reception. Effective induction arrangements, including home visits, establish a secure bond with parents and carers and ensure that children feel safe. Welfare matters have a high profile. Children are well cared for and build good relationships with adults and with other children. They behave very well and engage confidently with others, developing independence in their learning. They make good progress, particularly in communication and language, in knowledge and understanding of the world and in creative development. The Nursery is particularly effective in ensuring that children with English as an additional language develop sufficient facility in English to be able to access the full curriculum. As they enter Year 1, children's skills and knowledge are increasingly close to those expected. Improving skills in reading and writing are well supported by an effective programme for teaching sounds and letters.

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Although some staff are relatively inexperienced, focused teaching and effective support to ensure consistency of good practice ensure that children successfully extend and develop their skills. Sessions of direct teaching provide good challenge and successfully meet children's needs across the ability range. A good balance of activities chosen by children and those led by adults ensures that learning sustains a good pace. Children have good opportunities to make choices, both indoors and outside. The classrooms provide a well-resourced learning environment and the outdoor area is used effectively. All areas of learning are planned for appropriately. Thorough assessments provide good information on children's progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader makes effective use of available data to track children's progress and has a clear understanding of the strengths of the provision.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are happy with the school and with the quality of care their children receive. One said, 'I am very pleased with every aspect of the teaching, support and well-being of my children.' Parents and carers appreciate the opportunities which the school offers and the approachability and professionalism of the staff. One or two parents and carers had concerns as to the tone and effectiveness of written communications to parents and carers about attendance. However, the inspection team found that such letters are mostly of standard format and produced by the local authority. The school's work to raise attendance and improve punctuality has been very successful.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Beechfield 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 112 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 229 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	70	63	41	37	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	66	59	45	40	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	62	55	47	42	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	51	46	51	46	7	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	54	48	43	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	48	49	44	5	4	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	58	52	49	44	2	2	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)	38	34	55	49	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	34	61	54	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	40	58	52	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	41	37	57	51	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	53	47	51	46	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	54	47	42	1	1	0	0

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



11 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beechfield School, Watford, WD24 5TY

Thank you for making us so welcome during our visit. We were glad to have the opportunity to meet you and hear your views. We found that yours is a satisfactory school, though it has some real strengths. These are the things we liked best.

You work hard, enjoy lessons and behave well.

You have made particularly good progress in writing this year.

You undertake some jobs and make a good contribution to the school, and there are some good links with the local community.

You feel safe and know how important it is to eat healthily and stay fit.

Those of you who speak English as an additional language benefit from the focus on basic English skills. You enjoy the after-school clubs.

School leaders ensure that you are well looked after.

We are asking the school to make some changes to help you do better.

It should help you to make as much progress in mathematics and science as you do in reading and writing.

It should encourage teachers to make sure that their lessons have a good pace, that your written work sets a high standard and that marking in all subjects is really clear about what you need to do to improve.

It should make sure that school leaders and teachers who lead subjects ensure that you get good opportunities to learn across all the subjects.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and do your best. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan

Lead inspector

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