

Beacon Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124908
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	381005
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	158
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Allan Cadzow
Headteacher	Carolyn Davis
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
School address	Stone Lodge Lane West Ipswich Suffolk IP2 9HW
Telephone number	01473 601175
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Sixteen lessons were observed, involving 15 members of staff. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, senior staff, members of the interim executive board and the local authority representative. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, the school development plan, pupils' work and assessment information. Information was considered from the questionnaires from 108 parents and carers, 124 pupils and 32 staff.

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

- How many pupils make good progress from their individual starting points?
- How well does the curriculum meet the needs of differing groups of pupils, including the most able?
- How have leaders and managers at all levels shown that they are driving improvement, particularly in addressing the weaknesses identified since the last inspection?

Information about the school

Beacon Hill is a day special school for pupils in Ipswich and surrounding areas who have moderate learning difficulties. Each pupil has a statement of special educational needs and approximately a third have learning needs associated with autism. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. Although registered to admit pupils from the age of five years, there have been no pupils of this age on roll since before the time of the last inspection. Therefore, provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage was not included in this inspection. The school runs an after-school club, which is managed by the governing body and operates between 3.30pm and 6.00pm each day for up to 36 pupils. This is currently attended by six pupils.

In February 2011, the local authority issued a statutory warning notice to the school because of ongoing concerns about leadership and management, particularly in relation to financial matters. In May 2011, the local authority used its powers to replace the governing body with an interim executive board. The intention is that a new governing body will take over from the interim executive board in May 2012. The current headteacher has been in post for the past two terms and the above concerns are not in relation to her leadership. The leadership team has been restructured recently and is not yet up to full strength.

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. It has been through a difficult and turbulent 18 months. The local authority took a strong lead to ensure that the school is now led and managed as it should be. The headteacher and the interim executive board have made a good start in implementing the necessary changes to procedures, practices, roles and responsibilities. There is a new leadership team, an accurate evaluation of where strengths and weaknesses lie and the budget is on a firm financial footing. It is acknowledged that there is still more to do and that these are early days for some of the leaders' actions to take full effect. Nevertheless, the capacity for leaders and managers to make the required difference is satisfactory because it is sufficiently proven. The school community can now move forward with confidence and put the past problems behind them.

Expectations on leaders and managers have been revised and raised. In the past, the school has not been sufficiently self-critical or challenged their practice, resulting in an over-inflated view of the quality of the provision. For example, the good attention given to pupils' personal development is not equally matched with that for their academic potential. As a result, weaknesses in assessment, teaching and the curriculum have not always been identified. Three key things have not yet been fully addressed. First, the difference between pupils making good or satisfactory progress in lessons is in the quality of planned opportunities for them to work independently at their own level and how involved they are in assessing their learning. Second, assessment focuses on tracking attainment rather than progress. This means that the use of targets is not well developed. Third, the curriculum is suitably broad but not well balanced for all pupils and all subjects, and opportunities for developing important skills across subjects are not well planned.

Pupils, parents and carers are very supportive and proud of the school. Relationships and communication between home and school are good. Good care and guidance from staff make a significant difference to pupils feeling safe and secure in school and to their good behaviour.

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.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by:
 - ensuring good progress in lessons through activities that are planned to meet the needs of each individual
 - giving pupils a greater awareness of the part that they play in their learning.
- Improve assessment by:
 - having a clearer view about the amount of progress that pupils can and do make
 - setting targets that stretch across each key stage.
- Audit and review the curriculum to ensure that:
 - literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are planned across the whole curriculum
 - there is an appropriate and fair balance between subjects in each key stage.
- Embed the roles and responsibilities of leaders, managers and those responsible for the governance of the school by:
 - being more evaluative and self-critical
 - reflecting on and challenging one another's practice
 - focusing on the difference that their plans and action make to pupils' academic, as well as personal development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The progress that pupils make from their individual starting points is satisfactory. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, pupils usually go on to college courses to extend the entry level qualifications achieved in school and a few go straight into employment.

In class, when challenged to apply what they know and can do, pupils rise to the occasion and become confident in getting on with the work independently and collaboratively. For example, Year 11 pupils helped one another to improve their computer presentations, making good progress in their understanding and use of the technology and producing very individual pieces of work. In a primary class, pupils encouraged one another to understand new words and made good progress in sequencing stories. Good behaviour and an ability to make informed choices enabled Year 9 pupils to develop their art project work well.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have no particular privileges for being the eldest in the school and this limits their autonomy and preparation for adulthood and the wider world of work and further education. Others sometimes rely too much on adults

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doing things for them because their independence is not well planned for in lessons. The small group of pupils with autism in the new class are responding very well to the change in their provision. They are more active in learning and less anxious in this new environment. The behaviour and engagement of those with autism in the rest of the school indicates that they feel calm and secure. New pupils are very positive about the welcome they received, the friendships that they have made already and the fact that this helped them to settle quickly. Many other pupils report that they have lots of friends in school. Their ability to get on well with one another contributes to feeling safe and happy in school. Through good relationships with staff, pupils have the confidence to talk to adults about problems as they arise.

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	*
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	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning varies and is satisfactory overall with some that is good. Some lessons are not well planned, resulting in pupils of differing abilities all doing the same work and support staff not always being well deployed to support learning. There is an over-reliance on worksheets and a lack of marking and feedback. This not only limits pupils' independence and responsibility to record and revisit what they have learned but also means that they miss out on opportunities to know how to improve their work. This matches with the views of pupils who expressed the opinion that they do not learn enough in class and that they do not know how well they are doing. Activities and resources are not always age appropriate. Pupils make the best progress in lessons where they are taught skills

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low. In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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and knowledge systematically, specifically and with the appropriate support for speaking, listening and communicating their understanding. Pupils' behaviour is managed well in lessons.

Not all classes and subjects are taught by teachers. This affects the overall quality of the provision. In addition, the curriculum is not evenly balanced across key stages and subjects and opportunities to extend literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills are not well planned into other subjects. Personal and social aspects of the curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils support them well in a successful transition to college. The very recently implemented curriculum for a small group of pupils with autism is working well to meet their complex needs. The after-school club and those at lunchtime provide a good range of opportunities for pupils to extend their social development.

The care, guidance and pastoral support provided by staff is a particular strength of the school's work. The school works very well in partnership with pupils' families to ensure that concerns are addressed quickly and that pupils get the right support from external services, particularly in relation to their health. Arrangements for pupils when they join and leave the school are good, enabling them and their families to look forward to the next stage with confidence.

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 school development plan accurately identifies the main areas for improvement as leadership and assessment. The headteacher, ably supported by two assistant headteachers, is addressing the most important things and challenging the school's practice and the quality of provision. The senior team and subject leaders have new roles and responsibilities and are getting to grips with what this entails, particularly in relation to assessment, monitoring and evaluation. They are keen to drive improvement and to put the past uncertainty and instability behind them.

The interim executive board members are very experienced and dedicated to their role. Although in existence for only a short time, the board has a clear appreciation of the job to be done and provides a strong steer for the school through appropriate challenge and support. Some difficult decisions have been made, not least in relation to the budget, which although in significant deficit, is now under control. Plans are already in place to support a new governing body, when appointed.

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Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively through a whole-school approach to providing good care, guidance and support to pupils and their families. Regular 'welfare meetings' and 'solution surgeries' tackle potential barriers to pupils' personal development and well-being. Community cohesion is promoted well. Staff know the needs and issues faced by families very well and work in partnership to support them. This helps pupils to get on well with others in their wider communities, as well as helping them to appreciate one another's religious and ethnic differences. Older pupils understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens within national contexts.

The way that the school safeguards its pupils, while satisfactory overall, is good in relation to child protection and inter-agency work. Other aspects, such as health and safety and recruitment checks, meet requirements.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

A high proportion of parents and carers responded through the questionnaire and almost half provided written comments. Almost all say that they are happy with their child's experience at the school. A very small minority disagreed with a few of the statements. Written responses indicate that most parents and carers feel that the school is an open, welcoming place and that they feel well supported by staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Beacon Hill 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 108 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 158 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	56	40	37	4	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	71	66	35	32	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	57	53	43	40	5	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	46	41	38	8	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	61	56	43	40	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	53	49	43	40	7	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	46	52	48	0	0	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)	52	48	49	45	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	59	55	38	35	4	4	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	55	51	46	43	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	49	45	42	4	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	55	51	44	41	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	65	60	34	31	4	4	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



23 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Hill School, Ipswich, IP2 9HW

Thank you for the help that you gave to me and the other inspectors when we came to inspect your school. It was a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for filling in the questionnaires. We were very pleased to hear what you thought about your school and to see how well you are doing in lessons. Most of you told us that you like coming to school and that you feel safe when you are there. You also said that staff and children are very friendly. We could see that you enjoy the time with your friends in class and on the playground. Some of you told us that you could work even harder in lessons.

We found that Beacon Hill School is a satisfactory school, which means that staff are doing the things that they should but that some things still need to improve. So, there are some things that we have asked Mrs Davis and the staff to think about. The work that you do in lessons needs to challenge some of you more. Staff need to check whether you are doing your best. The timetable needs to be looked at so that you have enough time for all of your subjects. We found that the school does some things well. For example, staff take good care of you and this helps you and your families to look forward to the future.

I am sure that you will want to help Mrs Davis and the staff to make some changes. You could help with this by letting them know what you think needs to change in class and around the school.

I hope that this term goes well.

Thank you again.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

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