

Beechwood School

Long Readings Road, Slough SL2 1QE

Inspection dates

4–5 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Achievement in mathematics, science and a few other subjects lags behind that in English. The percentage of pupils attaining high grades in Year 11 and the sixth form has been low in the past.
- Small gaps remain between the progress made by boys and girls, between different ethnic groups and between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment lacks consistency, particularly in pupils' responses to teachers' feedback.
- Just occasionally, new members of staff do not clamp down quickly on pupils talking rather than concentrating in lessons.
- New subject leaders need time to generate consistent, good progress in their subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has led many developments including strengthening teaching and learning, staff training and the curriculum, all of which have improved the education pupils experience. The headteacher and senior leaders are effective.
- The governing body has reinforced its work and keeps a sharp eye on pupils' progress, spending and on the welfare of staff and pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is at least good in many lessons and around the school. Pupils appreciate the excellent facilities and feel safe and happy.
- The sixth form is now well led and progress is good overall, particularly in work-related courses. Learners mature into thoughtful young adults.
- Teaching and achievement in English are very strong with a high proportion of pupils making even more progress than is expected nationally.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare and arrangements for their safety are strengths of the school's care for all pupils.
- Leaders work hard to match additional support with pupils' abilities and interests, whether for the most able, the disadvantaged, those who speak English as an additional language or those who have special educational needs or disability.
- Pupils are well prepared for their future lives. They debate topical issues in form times.
- There is good provision for the most-able pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by:
 - aiming for progress in all subjects, especially in mathematics and science, to match that seen in English and other successful departments
 - checking that all pupils regularly experience 'advanced learning' (at the heart of the school's teaching and learning strategy) to extend pupils' confidence and ambition
 - intensifying the focus on more pupils and learners (sixth formers) attaining high GCSE, A-level and work-related course grades
 - narrowing further the gaps in progress between boys and girls, between disadvantaged pupils and others and between different ethnic groups.
- Strengthen teaching and learning by:
 - insisting that learning mirrors the school's policy on giving pupils 'Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time' (DIRT) when they receive feedback on their work
 - supporting subject leaders, especially those new to their roles, to establish consistency in their teams so that pupils make at least good progress
 - sharing the high-quality teaching and learning that already exists in English and other strong subjects, across the school
 - making sure that teachers who are new to the school adhere to the school's behaviour policy and do not let pupils talk when they should be listening and concentrating.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, has achieved many changes which have improved learning and school life for all pupils. She has focused tirelessly on addressing the three issues in the previous inspection report, which related to improving the quality of teaching, achievement and middle leaders' work. In addition, among other good developments, she has revitalised the curriculum, strengthened the quality of training for staff and successfully reorganised the senior leadership team. Parents, pupils and staff now believe in the school's motto: 'Try our best to do our best to be the best'.
- The governors, headteacher and senior leaders have established an atmosphere where pupils feel happy and safe, well cared for and know they are expected to work hard. A parent wrote that 'staff are passionate about success' and another that her child had received 'a well-rounded education and is well supported both academically and pastorally'. Senior leaders realise that some pupils have low self-esteem on arrival in Year 7 and work hard to boost their self-confidence. The continuing challenge is to raise the expectations of pupils and their families of what pupils can achieve.
- In spite of the governors', headteacher's and senior leaders' determination to have a full complement of skilful and effective teachers, a lack of applicants for posts in several subjects, particularly mathematics and science, has made this difficult. There has been some success but this problem will not go away – it is one faced by many schools in the locality. A science technician contributes successfully to the delivery of the sixth form BTEC science course, a sensible leadership decision as applicants for science posts are almost as rare as those for mathematics.
- Newly qualified and overseas-trained teachers, and graduates interested in the teaching profession, have been encouraged and supported to put their roots down in the school. However, no teacher is offered a full-time position simply to fill a space, so the need for a few supply teachers remains. Governors and senior leaders are acutely aware of parents' concerns about the numerous staff changes but the situation is far better now than in the past. New subject leaders, for example in mathematics and science, are working hard to establish consistency in the quality of teaching and learning; leadership and management will not be outstanding until all subject leaders are as strong as the best and outcomes rise further.
- Leaders know exactly where they need to generate rapid progress and their evaluation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses is realistic and accurate. Teachers rate highly the quality of training they receive. They are encouraged to attend courses that match their specific needs, for subject-specific expertise, familiarity with examination requirements or particular teaching skills. A new member of staff wrote that: 'I'm absolutely delighted to work here!'
- In 2015 some subject leaders over-predicted their GCSE results but assessments of pupils' progress are more accurate this year. As the predictions of several subject leaders (especially those new to the role) have been externally moderated, 2016 predictions for Year 11 outcomes are more reliable. They show that last year's weak subjects are set to do better.
- Funds for disadvantaged pupils are spent in many different ways and leaders realise that they need to be consistently sharp in assessing which ones are the most effective and best value for money. Nevertheless, it is clear that the academic and personal spending is helping these pupils to do as well as others in English and certain other subjects and is contributing to pupils' participation and enjoyment of school life.
- Pupils are getting a much broader, better and well-balanced curriculum and richer education than two years ago. Then, there was no music, computing or health and social care and very few pupils studied the sciences, humanities or a modern foreign language; all three are more popular now. Apart from GCSEs in English and mathematics, some pupils took only one work-related qualification out of a wide choice. Practically all those subjects continue as GCSE-level options. This year, over 20 Year 11 pupils are taking the three separate GCSE sciences. Several Year 8 pupils starting key stage 4 in September 2016 have chosen to take GCSE music.
- Provision for the most-able, gifted and talented pupils is very strong, with a Brilliant Club, half of whose members are disadvantaged pupils. Pupils of all abilities often enjoy and benefit from the numerous activities. These include science support, a focus on university options, mathematics challenges, writing mother's day poems and writing workshops.
- Many aspects of the school's activities contribute to pupils' very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These include a well-planned personal, social and health education programme, weekly discussions about the news in form time, assembly themes, visits (from a scientist and a paralympian judo expert for example), numerous trips and extra-curricular activities. Some pupils describe citizenship

as a feature of form time and the discussions about topical issues certainly contribute to pupils' understanding of British values and their good preparation for life in modern Britain.

- The same can be said for the very well-organised careers education, starting in Year 7, because pupils consider the world of work or money issues alongside how qualifications lead to different post-16 options. Pupils feel they have much knowledge to reflect on when deciding what to do; many in Year 11 are quite clear about their next steps.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance, along with many elements of leadership, has moved into a higher gear. Soon after the previous inspection, governors organised a review of their work. They slimmed down the number of governors and now have members with the relevant expertise and wisdom to see the school flourish. The chair is very experienced and leads members' deliberations well. In the last two years, governors' support for the school, as well as the quality of their questions about actions and their probing of outcomes, have improved. They organised training to extend their understanding of progress information and now ask pertinent and searching questions of senior leaders, who attend most of their meetings.
 - Governors have been fully involved in the serious problem of appointing staff. They undertake their role in overseeing performance management with insight. They review the spending of pupil premium funds and seek confirmation that it is making a difference. They know that outcomes for White British pupils, especially boys, are coming closer to those of other pupils but accept that some of these pupils, based on their starting points, need to make more rapid progress to achieve good GCSEs.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff observe that 'systems are in place to make the school a happy place to be'. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are indeed extremely well managed. The achievement centre works hard to maintain strong links with outside agencies and makes referrals promptly and efficiently if necessary.
- All staff receive regular up-to-date training and senior leaders keep meticulous records to check no one has missed any course. All staff have followed 'Prevent' duty training and most of them have completed WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) training, an indicator of the school's commitment to supporting pupils' overall well-being and safety. Senior leaders are keen to seek parents' involvement in many aspects of school life, by running information evenings, about pupils' work and the curriculum, the Brilliant Club and health issues, for example. Parents are always consulted about any issues related to their child: 'they always make me aware about any concern', observed one parent.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently effective in a small number of subjects including science and mathematics – these two departments have a large number of new staff. They have not yet all used their subject expertise to stimulate pupils' interest and enthusiasm and to overcome the poor progress in the past generated by the many changes of staff.
- An improvement point in the previous inspection report was to challenge pupils at the right level of difficulty. Most groups of pupils now do work they can just manage and make strong progress. There are still examples of work that is too easy for the most able or too difficult for others, so progress is limited in these classes – one reason why teaching requires improvement. In mathematics, the most able do not regularly explore topics in depth or practise problem-solving to extend their understanding.
- The school's enthusiasm for advanced learning involves more than just extra activities for the most-able pupils and others but focuses on particular approaches to learning. DIRT dominates the school's teaching policy and, from looking at pupils' books, it is clear how effective it is when applied well. Pupils read what teachers have written and respond to any questions or comments. This happens consistently in a range of subjects, including English, geography and history, but is hard to find in French, for example. There is a correlation between effective application of DIRT and good progress so teaching and learning have the potential to improve when all departments are as good as the best.
- It is a feature of many successful lessons that teachers pose questions which make pupils think hard and explain their responses using subject-specific vocabulary. Skilfully selected video clips or the concentration required to answer quick questions on small whiteboards often capture pupils' attention as the starting point of a lesson.

- Teachers are increasingly successful at helping pupils to prepare for their examinations, both practically and emotionally. Teachers unpick the wording of questions and probe how well pupils can interpret them. A parent wrote about the 'excellent after-school exam support and revision classes from caring and hardworking teachers'.
- Year 7 pupils particularly commented on how learning support assistants are supportive and help the whole class. During the inspection they were seen taking the initiative by identifying particular pupils who clearly needed help.
- It is a strength of the school's teaching that all pupils are brought up to speed with their reading and writing. Many pupils make rapid progress in the many small groups, or extra sessions after school designed to bring their reading age up to their chronological one. The same expertise is seen in the delivery of English for pupils who speak it as an additional language.
- The great majority of teachers do not need to say or do anything about behaviour because pupils know how they must behave; lessons get off to a prompt start and progress flourishes. A few, mostly new, teachers start lessons by talking before there is silence or do not make clear what pupils are meant to do. As quiet chatter continues, progress slows down.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils say that they feel very safe and well supported, reflecting a staff comment that there is 'an amazing school ethos'. To support pupils' wide range of learning and personal needs, the school's achievement centre arranges a large number of interventions. These extend from a wide range designed to improve numeracy, writing, and reading ages to a successful mindfulness programme (in liaison with a local authority mental health team), and from examination preparation support to courses to address anxiety issues.
- A recently appointed special educational needs consultant/coordinator is reviewing the rich provision for pupils' personal development. This is to be sure that learning support assistants are used as effectively as possible, that teachers use and respond to the information they receive about individual pupils, and that all the programmes are assessed and adapted as needed.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability much appreciate the valuable support they receive from learning support assistants in class and from teachers and learning support assistants in the achievement centre. On rare occasions, a few of them feel that too little is done if they are teased but they are confident they are making progress and say that they enjoy school life. A parent wondered whether using technology more could help these pupils.
- Selected Year 10 pupils meet new Year 7 pupils in their primary schools so they can help them to feel welcome. About 20 Year 8 pupils are being trained by a local charity to promote inclusion and conflict resolution, particularly to support vulnerable pupils. Sixth form mentors link up with individual pupils who may need encouragement or support. There is a clear spirit of willingness to help others.
- Pupils attending full-time, off-site provision learn basic skills and follow work-related courses in a structured environment which matches their personal needs; their behaviour improves. Their attendance is not as strong as in Beechwood but it is monitored carefully. A well-considered programme, including opportunities to gain qualifications in sports, supports these pupils' personal development and welfare well.
- Close to 30 pupils with a range of abilities choose to attain motor vehicle qualifications at Pitstop as one of their key stage 4 option subjects. They do well and a few continue to advanced courses at a local college.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They wear their school uniform smartly and behave very sensibly, moving around the large site at break and lunchtimes. The building is almost 10 years old but looks as good as new because pupils respect their environment and the artwork and interesting displays.
- Behaviour in lessons is often very good with pupils being keen to learn and work hard. Only a small proportion of pupils do not present their work in a neat and well-organised manner. Behaviour is not outstanding because a few pupils have yet to appreciate the self-discipline needed to be successful learners so, if unchecked, they chatter too much in lessons

- Attendance continues to be above average, although boys' attendance is not as good as girls'. Disadvantaged pupils attend at least as well as others but those with special educational needs or disability tend to miss more days. Exclusions have fallen each year since the previous inspection as pupils' behaviour has improved.
- Pupils describe how they discuss types of bullying in depth in personal, social and health education lessons and that incidents are rare and staff take them very seriously. Pupils learn about e-safety in computing lessons and are fully aware of the dangers of social media. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds work and socialise together harmoniously and support each other; they discuss sensitive issues such as homophobia, radicalisation and extremism in a mature way. They much appreciate the school's firm anti-discrimination stance.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Outcomes in mathematics, science and a few other subjects declined in 2015 with well below average GCSE results. Few pupils, especially the most able, attained high grades. Less than 40% of boys attained five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. This also applies to the two thirds of Year 11 pupils who had White British, other White, Black Caribbean and African heritages. The poor progress was largely due to a lack of subject specialists and to a considerable staff turnover. In contrast, results in English, a well-led and stable department, were well above average in 2014 and 2015.
- In 2015, Year 11 boys and pupils with special educational needs or disability made too little progress in mathematics, science and the humanities. In contrast, all pupils, including the most able, did very well in English and many of them exceeded the national percentage of pupils making even more than the expected progress.
- Progress is certainly better this year but it requires improvement because it is not consistently good or rapid enough in all classes and subjects for pupils to achieve their full potential. Leaders are fully aware of where they need to focus their support and which pupils are underachieving. However, the boys and ethnic minority groups who underachieved in 2015 are not so far from other groups this year and the gaps are small in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils who took work-related qualifications last year achieved well, particularly in travel and tourism. Several pupils who speak English as an additional language take GCSE or AS level in their home language and achieve high standards. The English as an additional language coordinator continues to support and prepare these pupils very well for their examinations.
- Practically all disadvantaged pupils make as much progress in English as other pupils. In 2015, their progress matched or exceeded that made by other pupils nationally. The opposite was true in mathematics even though the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally narrowed a little between 2014 and 2015 and is predicted to do so again in 2016.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability achieve similarly to others, making very good progress in English but only recently making better progress in mathematics and science. Progress in science is much stronger this year, particularly for those taking the three separate subjects (mostly the most able) and additional science. However, it is not strong enough in the core science groups. White British boys particularly find this subject difficult.
- As well as the pupils who are eligible for catch-up funding, many Year 7 pupils need to improve their reading (particularly comprehension), writing and numeracy skills. Senior leaders monitor carefully when pupils have improved enough to be 'secondary school ready' following intensive support, which continues as long as it is needed. Pupils' reading ages are rapidly improving to match their chronological ages as the wide range of programmes used are matched to their specific needs.
- In line with their commitment to advanced learning strategies, senior leaders are keen that all pupils, not just the most able, experience activities which give them confidence and enjoyment and widen their horizons. In a young writers competition last year, over 100 Beechwood pupils, with a range of abilities, were selected to have their work published. The school's team was the first from a non-selective school to win the local heat in a speaking competition; two of the team were disadvantaged pupils.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Achievement has improved since the previous inspection. One reason is because leadership is now strong and effective. The proportion of learners meeting their targets, based on their end of Year 11 starting points, increased in 2015. At the same time, the small gaps between different groups of learners, such as girls and boys or different ethnic minority groups, narrowed. Present learners are making good progress and added value measures for academic courses are improving.
- Teaching and learning are good because there are more subject specialists and staff with experience of examination preparation. Learners regularly explore the requirements of questions, discuss sample answers and teachers then help them to put this understanding into practice. Teachers provide useful resources and particularly encourage learners to analyse and decide which aspects of their work they need help with.
- Learners have to define terms they use accurately, reflect on each other's work and learn to be critical and reflective. Many of those following level 3 work-related courses feel confident that the style of learning suits them well. Since some learners' writing is not at the high level required for post-16 work, many teachers are conscientious about correcting spelling and grammar. The few learners who did not attain grade C in GCSE English in Year 11 usually achieve this at their first retake. The larger number needing this grade in mathematics have not done so well in the past but the new subject leader for mathematics is determined to get them through.
- Leaders have raised the Year 11 standards required to start academic subjects and have carefully reviewed the subjects on offer; geography and biology A level, for example, will be reintroduced in the next academic year as the school now has experienced staff to deliver these subjects. Years 11 to 12 transition projects are in place to help learners appreciate the depth of work required and the skills needed for sixth form work.
- At the same time, the short- and long-term careers information and guidance given to learners has been sharpened up so the 16 to 19 study programmes they select are at the right level and style of working to match their abilities and aspirations. In 2015, all learners proceeded to university, higher education, apprenticeships or employment and four out of five of present learners plan to go to university.
- Talking to learners confirmed how well leaders prepare them for their futures and the world of work. The personal, social and health education programme covers a range of topics including coping with stress, British politics and life skills. Learners are expected to keep abreast of current affairs.
- At the time of the previous inspection learners did not make 'fast enough progress', particularly in academic courses. Outcomes revealed underachievement in a few subjects, which has been tackled firmly this year. The popular work-related courses have been strong for several years with most learners achieving subsidiary or full diplomas in subjects such as applied sciences, business studies, information technology and tourism.
- Sixth formers' behaviour is exemplary. They are good role models for the younger pupils, often helping them with their work or personal issues. Learners can apply for a number of positions of responsibility which develop their leadership and independent skills well and some give them paid work experience in the school. Retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are good and practically all learners complete their programmes of study.

School details

Unique reference number	110076
Local authority	Slough
Inspection number	10012214

This inspection 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 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	814
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Rowley
Headteacher	Kathleen Higgins
Telephone number	01753 520473
Website	www.beechwood.slough.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@beechwood.slough.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 2014

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than the average sized 11–18 school. Boys outnumber girls in all years.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after.
- The proportion of White British pupils is below 40% with over 10% from other White backgrounds, over 20% of Asian heritage and over 10% of Black African or Caribbean heritage. There are small proportions of pupils from several other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A well above average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A well above average proportion of pupils receive support for special educational needs or disability.
- A very small number of pupils from Years 10 and 11 attend full-time alternative educational provision at Spingboard, part of Haybrook College. They follow bespoke work-related courses and study basic skills in English and mathematics. Several pupils from Years 10 and 11 attend Pitstop for two or three lessons a week as one of their key stage 4 option subjects. They follow levels 1 and 2 motor vehicle qualifications and some go on to college for level 3 work.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in over 40 part-lessons. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. In practically all lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books.
- Year 9 pupils were taking examinations during the inspection so it was not possible to observe any lessons in this year.
- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils, including a Year 9 class during their form time in the morning, and talked to others informally during break times. Discussions were held with staff including pastoral and academic senior and middle leaders. Meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and two other governors and with a consultant who supports the school on behalf of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the very small number of parents' responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 20 parents submitted written comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the online questionnaire completed by members of staff but no pupils completed their questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's whole-school evaluation and progress plans for 2015/16, past and present standards and progress information, records about behaviour and attendance and a range of policies and summaries of school activities.

Inspection team

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Susan Willman	Ofsted Inspector

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