

# Beacon of Light School

Beacon of Light, Stadium Park, Sunderland SR5 1SU

## Inspection dates

2–3 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable. Sometimes, teachers do not match learning activities closely enough to the ability of pupils. The extent to which teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs is inconsistent.
- The teaching of English requires improvement. Some tasks are too easy for pupils. Some pupils are not given enough structured support to help them to complete more-complex or advanced activities.
- The most able pupils are not challenged consistently well in their learning. In addition, sometimes lower-attaining pupils, or those with additional learning needs, do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The standards of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are too low by the time they leave school in Year 11.

### The school has the following strengths

- The school is improving strongly. The principal is determined and effective. Her tenacious approach to all aspects of school life is central to the improvements that are evident at school. Together with other leaders and trustees, she has successfully ensured that the quality of the curriculum and the progress that pupils make is improving.
- Standards of behaviour have been turned around. Pupils focus well in lessons, act in a respectful manner towards each other, and behave well at school.
- The principal and her team, ably supported by knowledgeable trustees, have a good understanding of the school's strengths and where things need to improve. Together, they have a track record of improvement.
- Pupils, staff and parents have a very positive view of the quality of education on offer. Pupils feel that they have a voice and that adults listen to them.
- Pupils' personal development is strong. The curriculum is designed so that pupils develop life skills, contribute to the local community, and prepare themselves for life after school. Socially, pupils are ready for their next stage in education, employment or training by the time they leave school.
- The school's strapline is 'learn more, do more, be more'. The school is increasingly effective in supporting pupils to this end. Pupils are happy, feel safe and enjoy school. Pupils leave Year 11 with appropriate plans for their futures.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that pupils achieve consistently well across the curriculum, by ensuring that:
  - the planning and delivery of the English curriculum is strengthened
  - teachers plan to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs consistently well
  - learning activities match the ability of pupils more closely, so that a greater proportion of pupils, including the most able, make strong gains in their learning
  - teachers support pupils effectively to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Committed, determined and effective aptly describes the principal at Beacon of Light. Her focused and tenacious approach to all aspects of school life is central to the improvements that are evident at school.
- Since the opening of the school, the principal and her team have worked with cohorts of pupils, many of whom who have complex social and emotional needs. Year on year, the behaviour of pupils in school has improved. It is now good. As a rule, from the time pupils join the school, their behaviour improves significantly. Pupils are focused in classrooms, behave well around the building, and show respect both to each other and to other adults.
- There have been pressures for leaders in the early stages of the school's development. Preparing for the move into the new building was an additional focus for the senior team. The focus on meeting the pastoral needs of individual pupils was not lost during this time.
- Other areas of the school's work are improving strongly. The principal, ably supported by her vice-principal, knows the strengths and areas for development in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders are aware that the progress that pupils make across the curriculum needs to improve further.
- Members of staff appreciate the professional development opportunities that are on offer. These are rich and varied. The principal has ensured that staff training has been matched correctly to the needs of pupils and staff throughout the evolution of the school. Earlier in the school's development, training was linked to improving pupils' behaviour. The impact of this is evident in the good behaviour demonstrated by pupils. Professional development for staff is now focused, rightly, on further developing the quality of academic provision, particularly in English.
- The progress that pupils make at school is improving. Each year since its opening, the standards that pupils have attained on leaving the Beacon of Light in Year 11 have increased.
- Pupils arrive at school at different times during the academic year, with wide ranges of academic, social and emotional needs. Leaders ensure that their starting points, both academically and emotionally, are assessed accurately.
- Systems to track the progress that pupils are making, and the standards that they are reaching are accurate and comprehensive. Leaders use this information increasingly effectively to intervene when pupils are falling behind or when there are gaps in their knowledge. 'Skills ladders' are used to help many pupils to make greater progress.
- Commissioning schools have generally positive views about the standards of education on offer. They particularly praise the pastoral support given to individual pupils.
- The principal has built her team to create capacity for further improvement. For example, new leaders in teaching and learning are developing their skills strongly. The special educational needs coordinator has ensured that pupils with additional needs are swiftly identified.

- The principal and her team are highly focused and know exactly where the school is on its trajectory of improvement. Development plans are strong. Areas for further improvement that inspectors noted during the inspection already form part of these plans. Leaders are 'on it' and leave no stone unturned to make sure that pupils get an increasingly good deal.
- Pupils, staff and parents have a very positive view of the quality of education on offer. Pupils feel listened to and feel that they have a voice. The principal is known to many as 'the heart of the Beacon family'.

### **Governance of the school**

- Trustees are a force for improvement. They have a deep knowledge of the school and actively support its community. 'Governor glances', where trustees come into school and look at aspects of the school's work to help them to understand the strengths and areas for development of the school, give them a detailed insight into the school's performance.
- Trustees think deeply about their own effectiveness. They have ensured that members of the board have a range of useful skills in order to support school leaders. They have a strong moral compass and want only the best for the pupils at their school.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Systems and procedures to ensure that pupils are protected from harm are effective. Safeguarding training for members of staff is up to date and policies are comprehensive. They meet legal requirements.
- Staff briefings are pivotal to safeguarding arrangements. Each day, all members of staff meet together before and after school. Here, possible 'flash points' are discussed, and any particular support strategies for individual pupils shared. These meetings enable quick and effective communication. Any potential safeguarding issues are identified and then followed up where necessary.
- School leaders deal with any emerging child protection issues immediately. They are tenacious in ensuring that the pupils in their care receive the support to which they are entitled.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching in English requires improvement. This is because teachers do not plan lessons in a way that helps pupils to make step-by-step improvements in their writing or in their understanding. Some tasks are too easy for pupils. On other occasions, pupils are not given enough structured support to help them to complete more complex activities. For example, when writing at length, pupils start off well, but this often tails off because the 'building blocks' for the activity have not been covered well enough in class.
- In other curriculum areas, pupils are occasionally required to focus on completing or

repeating tasks rather than grappling with concepts that will help them to make gains in their learning. Sometimes, teachers do not match learning activities closely enough to the ability of pupils. In addition, teachers do not plan consistently well to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs.

- Nonetheless, teaching in mathematics and science is strong. In these subjects, teachers listen intently to the answers that pupils give, and systematically develop their understanding. Exercise books show that gaps in pupils' knowledge are identified and that teachers plan to help pupils to catch up if needed in these subjects.
- Teachers have been using a variety of strategies to help pupils to focus on any gaps in their knowledge and to help them to address these. 'Skills ladders' break down subject knowledge into smaller units and allow pupils to track their own progress. 'Cold tasks' given at the beginning of a topic identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. At the end of a series of lessons 'hot tasks' are then used to show pupils how much they have improved.
- Where learning is stronger, teachers' subject knowledge is strong. This is particularly evident in mathematics, science and vocational subjects. Here, teachers also ensure that activities are engaging and match the abilities and interests of the pupils. A brisk pace of learning is maintained. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to support the learning of individual pupils.
- In vocational classrooms, pupils focus well on the task in hand. They develop practical skills and understanding in these subjects. Teachers effectively support individual pupils to develop skills that can be applied in different practical situations.
- Relationships between pupils and members of staff are positive in all classrooms. This is fundamental and ensures that learning can take place. Inspection evidence confirms that classrooms are generally calm environments and that pupils work well with their teachers.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They try hard in lessons and are increasingly resilient when they find new concepts in lessons challenging. Pupils come to school ready to learn.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school. Parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's surveys agree. Pupils said that if there was ever any bullying, this would be dealt with swiftly by adults in school. They spoke of the school as a 'family' and felt supported by staff and other pupils alike.
- Leaders support pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs well. Pupils have regular access to school nurses who help to deliver personal education programmes. Pupils have access to online platforms to support them if they are feeling in crisis. The curriculum covers issues linked to safety, well-being and how to live healthily effectively.

- Leaders are proactive in supporting pupils' wider development. Through creative curriculum afternoons, and 'Friday challenge', pupils develop wider skills that will be useful to them when they leave school. Pupils access a life-skills course which is highly practical in nature and helps to prepare pupils for life outside school. All pupils have access to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at school. Uniquely, pupils are able to access a wider curriculum within the Beacon of Light building, through participation in Foundation of Light (the official charity of Sunderland Association Football Club) courses, programmes and events.
- The school council plays an active role. Not only do school councillors help leaders to organise social activities, they also have a strong voice in helping leaders to develop provision further. For example, their opinions are taken on board when teaching groups are established or changed.
- Pupils are encouraged to engage with members of the local community. One recent example of this is pupils' work with veterans to create a commemorative community garden.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- School leaders have been tenacious in ensuring that pupils behave well and focus on their learning. Leaders have had a substantial impact in this area of school life since the school was opened.
- Pupils' arrival at school is an excellent example of how teachers and pupils work together to ensure that behaviour is good and that there is appropriate mutual respect. On arrival, teachers sensitively check that pupils have no items on their person that are forbidden from school, and that their mobile phones and personal items are stored in a locker. Pupils understand why this process is in place and respond with cooperation.
- Pupils conduct themselves well throughout the school day. Routines and expectations are clearly established and consistently applied. Pupils generally move sensibly around school between activities.
- The 'raise responsibility' system provides a structure that helps pupils to reflect if their behaviour is inappropriate and rewards them for making sensible choices. Behaviour points and strong rates of attendance are rewarded at the end of term. Pupils are able to influence the rewards that are given, and this further increases their motivation.
- Members of staff work together to find 'hooks' to help each individual pupil to focus on their learning. Through this, pupils are 'nudged' effectively in the right direction. Members of staff are usually successful in de-escalating any problems. They pre-empt issues before they arise.
- Pupils behave well at breaktime and lunchtime. They enjoy spending time with each other. Members of staff ensure that this time is used constructively in developing pupils' social skills.
- As a direct result of the strong approach to helping pupils to regulate their actions and reflect on any incidences at school, there has been a reduction in the number of sanctions given. There has been a reduction in the time that pupils spend out of class for poor behaviour and in the number of fixed-term exclusions. The number of times

that pupils have needed to be physically guided for their own safety and that of others has also reduced significantly.

- Leaders place a high priority on assuring that pupils come to school on time and regularly. Many pupils respond to leaders' tenacity and, as a result, the vast majority attend school regularly and punctually.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **Requires improvement**

- Some pupils do not make the progress that they should because the quality of teaching and learning is too variable, particularly in English. Teachers' planning does not meet the needs of different pupils within classes consistently well. As a result, some of the most-able pupils do not achieve as well as they can. Sometimes, lower-attaining pupils, or those with additional learning needs, do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- School leaders are aware that some pupils' standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar remain low by the time they leave school in Year 11. The variable quality of teaching in English is limiting progress in this area.
- Each year that the school has been open, the rates of progress that pupils make has been increasing. This is because pupils are becoming more and more committed to their learning since joining the school, and because the quality of teaching is improving. New pupils arriving at the school see a calm and generally focused environment where other pupils try hard in classrooms. As a result, although overall outcomes require improvement, the progress that pupils in current Year 9 are making is good. Any gaps in their learning are swiftly identified and they are catching up strongly.
- In every year group, there are many examples of individual pupils who have overcome difficulties and made substantial progress over their time at the Beacon of Light.
- School leaders have become adept at matching qualifications to the abilities of individuals at school. As a result, each year pupils leave Year 11 with more-comprehensive evidence of their skills in order to support them in the next stages of their education, employment or training.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in education, employment or training by the time they leave The Beacon of Light. Pupils leave school with sensible and firm plans for the future.

## School details

Unique reference number	142882
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10087485

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

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Lynda Brown
Principal	Denise Taylor
Telephone number	0191 5515191
Website	<a href="http://www.beaconschool.org.uk">www.beaconschool.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:denise.taylor@beaconschool.org.uk">denise.taylor@beaconschool.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Beacon of Light School is an alternative provision free school for 60 pupils aged between 13 and 16. The school currently has 34 pupils (many Year 11 pupils left the roll of the school one week before the inspection). Pupils are dual registered. That is to say, they are on the roll of two schools: the commissioning school and Beacon of Light.
- Many pupils join and/or leave the school at different times during the academic year.
- The school provides for pupils, many of whom have social, emotional and mental health needs. Several have additional learning or behavioural needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than the national average.
- The school opened in September 2016. Members of staff and pupils moved into a new building in September 2018. The school was sponsored by the Foundation of Light, the official charity of Sunderland Association Football Club.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning and groups of pupils working in all classes. Inspectors observed learning jointly with the principal and vice-principal and discussed what was seen.
- Inspectors observed pupils when moving around the school and at social times. They also observed pupils arriving at school, the way in which they were welcomed and helped to focus on learning. Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons about their experience at school and looked at work in their books. An inspector listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the trust. Discussions also took place with senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for standards or behaviour and safeguarding. An inspector spoke with the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 24 responses to the pupil questionnaire. The 10 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, were also considered, including free-text comments.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documentation including: the school's view of its own performance; monitoring records; information about pupils' progress; improvement planning; and records of behaviour and attendance. Inspectors looked closely at records relating to safeguarding and child protection, and at policies, including those published on the school's website.

## Inspection team

Michael Wardle, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Zoe Westley

Ofsted Inspector

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