Beaminster School

Inspection Report

Better education and care

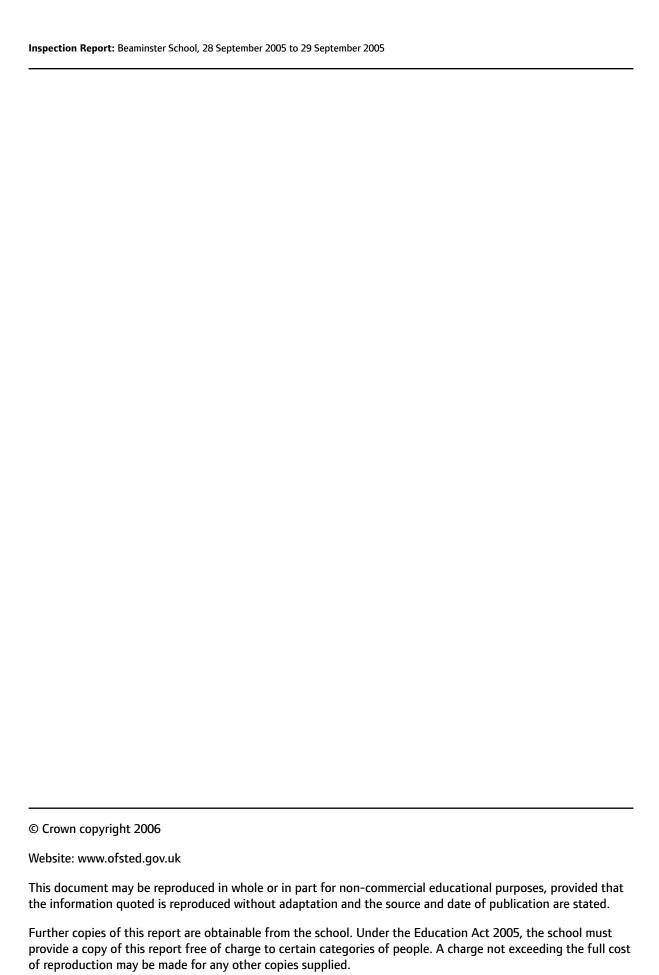|	
Unique Reference Number	113884
LEA	Dorset
Inspection number	279274
Inspection dates	28 September 2005 to 29 September 2005
Reporting inspector	Martyn Rhowbotham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	**School address**	Newtown
School category	Voluntary controlled		Beaminster
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Dorset DT8 3EP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	**Telephone number**	01308 862633
Number on roll	702	**Fax number**	01308 863 909
Appropriate authority	The governing body	**Chair of governors**	Mrs Caroline Payne
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	**Headteacher**	Mr Mike Best

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	28 September 2005 – 29 September 2005	279274

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Beaminster School is a smaller than average voluntary controlled mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18. It is the only secondary school in the small market town of Beaminster and has 739 pupils on roll. The sixth form is small with 79 students. It has specialist status in technology. Almost all students are from a White British heritage. The school serves a wide rural area of west Dorset and a very high proportion of pupils travel long distances to school. On entry to the school, students' achievements are broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above the national average and the school has special provision for 19 pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. A high proportion of pupils join from other schools in Years 10 and 11. The school has partnerships with other schools and colleges in order to extend the range of courses on offer.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. This concurs with the school's own evaluation. Leaders and managers have a clear view of the school's strengths and of what needs to be improved so as to ensure that all learners reach their full potential. The care, guidance and support provided to students are effective in helping them to learn well. Students behave well both in lessons and generally around the school. They are polite and courteous and keen to learn. They generally enjoy their education.

The school's performance in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good and standards have been raised to above the national average in most subjects. In Years 10 and 11 however, standards are variable between subjects and are at about the national average for schools of this type. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory overall but there is again considerable variation between subjects. The school has recently become more focused on the need to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school so as to minimise the inconsistencies between departments.

Parents and pupils are positive about the school. The arrangements for transition from primary schools are very highly regarded by parents. An effective induction programme supports this process and enables students to settle quickly into the school. Many students take part in the wide range of additional sporting and cultural activities offered.

Governors are committed to the success of the school and are very supportive of its values and ethos. They work well with the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The school has been successful in addressing the issues raised in the last inspection. The senior leadership team is relatively new in post and has begun to introduce some important changes, demonstrating good capacity to improve. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the sixth form is satisfactory. Post 16 provision is provided through a long-standing partnership with Sir John Colfox School in Bridport. This enables a wider choice of GCE A-levels and AS levels to be provided. As the sixth form is small, the choice of courses without this arrangement would be very narrow. The take up of the small number of vocational and non-advanced courses offered is low. The school accepts students with a wide range of abilities into the sixth form and standards and progress are satisfactory. Girls generally perform better than boys. Teaching is satisfactory. Students speak highly of the guidance and support they receive in the sixth form. Students also benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities and they play an active role in fund raising. Sixth form students enjoy their involvement with younger students in programmes such as paired reading schemes and peer mentoring. Progression from the sixth form into higher education is good.

What the school should do to improve further

•implement effective systems for ensuring consistent standards across departments in teaching, learning and other key aspects, as identified in the self-evaluation •make better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress, set targets and inform planning so as to raise the overall standard of teaching throughout the school, especially in Years 10-13 •work with Dorset local authority to manage the progressive reduction of the budget deficit •extend the sixth form curriculum to better meet the needs of all learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in Years 7, 8 and 9, particularly in science. Standards have risen steadily over recent years, with significant improvements in English, and students meet challenging targets. Results in the tests for Year 9 are now consistently above the national average. Students' progress in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Generally, standards at the end of Year 11 are close to the national average, although they vary from year to year and are affected by the relatively high proportion of pupils who join the school during Years 10 and 11. There is also considerable variation between subjects, with pupils performing consistently well in science and less well in English and design and technology. In 2005, results in Information and Communication Technology were well below the national average. The school is aware of the uneven progress that pupils make in different subjects and is embarking on a series of measures to improve teaching and learning and so ensure greater consistency and higher standards across the key stage. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions.

High levels of support enable pupils with a wide range of special educational needs to make good progress across both key stages. The relative performance of boys and girls is broadly similar in Years 7, 8 and 9 but varies from year to year in Years 10 and 11. Overall achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. Students' attainment and progress varies from year to year and across subjects. There was a significant improvement in 2005 in the pass rates for AS levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' development and well-being are good. A wide range of opportunities arise in lessons and in other activities for pupils to develop their social skills. Pupils have repeatedly shown their concern for the needs of others through the considerable sums of money they have raised for charities. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a wide range of social and cultural exchanges and visits.

Pupils' attitudes to their lessons are good. They respond positively and enjoy their learning, particularly when they are fully involved in all aspects of the lesson. The school holds high expectations of pupils' behaviour and these are met by pupils.

Attendance, while below that expected, is improving as a result of the introduction of effective monitoring procedures. The school makes every effort to support those pupils whose irregular attendance is a problem.

Pupils feel safe at school. The school usually addresses instances of bullying successfully and in an open manner. A recent survey of Year 7 pupils showed that they did not feel that bullying was a serious issue for them. When pupils have concerns, they are readily able to recognise those members of staff and senior students they can turn to for support. The recent attachment of senior prefects to tutor groups has provided a further way for younger pupils to seek advice. The school is seeking to engage more with pupils and parents to hear their views about a range of issues. The school council has been particularly successful in this respect. For example, it was fully involved in discussions that have contributed to the further development of healthy school meals. The school makes a major contribution to pupils' health and well-being through physical education and other aspects of the curriculum. Through the careers programme, work experience and support from Connexions, pupils have a good knowledge of the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school assesses the quality of teaching and learning to be satisfactory and this was confirmed by the inspection. Whilst there was very little unsatisfactory teaching, there was also very little teaching that was outstanding. Good teaching was seen in English and science, and amongst other subjects, where students were set challenging tasks, responded well, made good progress and enjoyed their learning. In the less successful lessons, a narrow range of teaching methods was employed and students were not challenged sufficiently. These lessons were not planned well and learning objectives were often too vague, making it difficult to measure whether effective learning had taken place during the lesson. The school monitors pupils' progress adequately but although some teachers use this information effectively to plan lessons, this practice is not yet consistent across the school. Pupils generally know how well they are doing and, in some subjects, know what they need to do to improve.

The system for observing teaching has been relatively informal. The limited recording of outcomes of lesson observations has not enabled the good practice identified to impact fully in all departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Although the range of courses is necessarily smaller than would be expected in a very large institution, the school provides a good curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all pupils. There are notably good features, such as the vocational courses in Years 10

and 11, and good collaboration with other schools and colleges means that a reasonable range can be provided in a cost-effective way. As a technology college, the school successfully encourages wide participation in technology based courses.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and there are particularly impressive arrangements to support pupils who are finding difficulty in coping with their school work. The curriculum supporting all pupils' personal development provides them with an important understanding of the world of work and prepares them well to be citizens in the modern world. Pupils speak very highly of the very good range of additional opportunities they have beyond the classroom and of the teachers' commitment to them. These activities significantly enhance the richness of the school's provision. The school has been awarded the Sportsmark.

The joint sixth-form arrangements with another school enable a sufficiently wide range of AS level and GCE A-level courses to be taught. Most of them are taught on both sites so that students have a base at their home school for all or most subjects. However, the take up in the sixth form of courses below AS level or of vocational courses is very low.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and speak highly of the support they receive in the main school and in the sixth form. The school's very good pastoral system supports pupils' academic progress and personal development well. The high level of co-operative working with feeder primary schools ensures that pupils are well prepared for their new experiences and eager to face new challenges. A significant number of pupils join the school during the year. The guidance and support received by these pupils, particularly those joining in Years 10 and 11, is of high quality and reflects the level of commitment of all staff to the personal development and academic success of the pupils concerned.

The school recognises that some pupils experience social or academic difficulties at some point in their school career. The Student Support and Guidance Centre provides excellent support for these pupils so that they can return as soon as possible to their normal lessons. The unit for pupils with moderate learning difficulties also provides very good academic and pastoral support for those pupils who have an increasingly complex range of needs. The academic and personal progress made by these pupils is good. Systems for child protection are good and known to all staff.

Through regular reports and consultations, the school involves pupils and parents in monitoring progress. Pupils are mainly positive about their involvement in setting and measuring their progress against their personal academic targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been considerable changes in the senior management team over recent years. In the past there has not been sufficient emphasis on monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, there are significant variations in the leadership and quality of provision in different subjects.

For example, assessment information is used well in science to track pupils' progress and set targets, while little use is made of it in some other subjects. The self evaluation prepared by the newly constituted senior management team recognises these weaknesses and demonstrates a clear determination to address them. The recent programme of lesson observations is being extended into revised systems for monitoring and evaluation, making better use of assessment data and focusing more closely on improving teaching and learning. Recent appointments have the potential to improve the effectiveness of middle management. While these changes in leadership and management are adding significantly to the school's capacity to improve, it is still too early to be able to assess their impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

The school works hard to gather the views of parents and pupils through questionnaires and informal dialogue and, where possible, it acts to deal with the issues that they raise. For example, the views of Year 7 pupils about their experiences in lessons are being incorporated within initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The school has a substantial deficit budget which has arisen from variations in the number of pupils, the cost of maintaining the sixth form and changes in funding arrangements. The local authority has agreed to the present deficit. However, the school monitors its expenditure carefully and is currently considering a number of strategies to reduce the deficit.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19

Overall effectiveness

	School Overall	16-19
How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

	School Overall	16-19
How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards[1] reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

	School Overall	16-19
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

	School Overall	16-19
How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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[1] Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know your school was inspected on 28th and 29th September 2005. Many of you will have seen the inspectors around the school and an inspector may have visited one of your lessons. Some of you came to meetings with inspectors where we discussed the school with you. Some of your parents or carers filled in confidential questionnaires about the school and we took their views into account when reaching our judgements. You were very polite during the inspection and were very good at helping us to find classrooms and offices when we got lost! You were also very good at talking about your work and the progress you felt you were making. You all made a contribution to the inspection and we would like to thank you very much for that. We encourage you to read the report. It will let you know in more detail what your school does well, where it could improve and the ways in which you can help your school do this.

The main strengths of the school are: •the standards and progress you make in Years 7, 8 and 9 •the good range of courses on offer in the main school •the achievements of students with learning difficulties and disabilities •the wide range of extra activities such as trips, etc. •your generally good attitude to learning •the support offered by your teachers •your generally sensible and mature behaviour around the school.

The school needs to: •work to make sure that you do well in all subjects in all year groups. You can help in this by working hard, attending and behaving well •set you targets to help you see where you are doing well and where you need more help •offer a wider range of courses other than A-levels in the sixth form.

Thank you again for your help in the inspection.