



Benfield School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108526
Local Authority Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number 288126
Inspection dates 17–18 October 2006
Reporting inspector Tom Grieveson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Benfield Road
School category	Community		Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear
Age range of pupils	11–18		NE6 4NU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 2656091
Number on roll (school)	988	Fax number	0191 2655974
Number on roll (6th form)	138		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Arnold Todd
		Headteacher	Mr Lee Brumby
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	17–18 October 2006	288126

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Benfield School is an average sized specialist sports college with information and communication technology as a second specialism and full service extended school status, situated in the east end of Newcastle upon Tyne. While the school takes students from a number of the city's wards, most reside in the Byker, Walkergate and Monkchester areas. Over 90% of students are White British. The number of students from minority ethnic communities has doubled in recent years and now represents almost 10% of the school population. Most of these students live in households where English is not the first language. The school has a much higher than average proportion of students eligible for free school meals. The number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Benfield is a good and improving school, which excels in the quality and range of its sports provision, the way in which it promotes aspects of students' personal development, and the manner in which it cares for their pastoral welfare. The school enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of its parents.

Standards have improved in the last two years and while they are still below average, the gap has closed significantly and particularly at Key Stage 4. The large majority of students throughout the school, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress in their learning and achieve well.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior leadership team demonstrate strong and ambitious leadership focused securely on raising standards and improving the life chances of students. Their dedication and commitment to improving the school is noteworthy. Collectively, they have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and a clear focus on those areas requiring improvement. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection because the school has increasingly improved its capacity to successfully tackle areas of weakness and continued to raise standards. New staff, and particularly new subject leaders, are proving to be effective and this has added significantly to the school's ability to maintain and improve on the gains already made. Nevertheless, there is still much to be achieved in relation to some departments. The school works outstandingly well with its key partners to promote the well-being of its students.

Teaching is mainly good and supports students' learning effectively. Students enjoy their learning because teachers make lessons interesting. The pace of learning is usually brisk; this captures students' interest and sustains their engagement. Consequently, most students demonstrate a genuine interest and enthusiasm for their work. However, some teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan activities that meet the needs of all learners and this restricts the progress of the least able groups in particular. In addition, the way teachers mark students' work is inconsistent and does not always provide students with sufficient information about how to improve.

The majority of students demonstrate consistently good attitudes to their work and school. Their behaviour is good and relationships between students and staff are strong and truly reflect the school's desire for all in the school community to demonstrate respect towards each other. Students are keen to talk about their work and most take pride in what they do. They are proud of their school and keen to talk about its achievements. The majority willingly accept responsibility for their work and actions.

The school provides excellent care for students. Safety procedures are robust and consistently carried out. Students are confident in their surroundings and this provides a secure platform to support their learning. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Benfield sixth form is satisfactory with some good features. Learners with a wide range of abilities enter the sixth form and the recently expanded good curriculum allows them to choose courses, which meet their needs well. Learners with well below average attainment make satisfactory progress in developing work-related skills, which prepares them for future employment. Learners on GCE A and AS level courses achieved below average standards in 2005 and 2006 but these results represent satisfactory progress given their attainment at the end of Year 11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners particularly value the individual help they receive with their work. However, not enough use is made of assessment information to track learners' performance, set them specific targets for learning or identify early enough those who are underachieving. Learners rightly feel that they are well cared for in the sixth form. Their personal development is good. In this secure and supportive environment, they are given the confidence to take responsibility and develop into responsible citizens. For example, over 40 sixth form learners are studying for sports coaching and leadership qualifications. Leadership and management of the sixth form is satisfactory and it runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to raise standards further:

- improve consistency in the use of assessment information to plan work that meets the needs of all learners
- improve the consistency of marking in students' workbooks to make it clear what they must do to improve further in their learning
- continue the robust review of subject departments in order to improve those departments which are still underperforming.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with standards which are well below average. However, they make good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and by the end of Year 9, the large majority achieve well. In 2005, students met their challenging targets in mathematics and science, although not in English. Whilst standards are below average overall, value added information shows that students' achievement placed the school in the top third nationally. Provisional test results for 2006 indicate that results have continued to improve in each subject with the biggest gains made in science.

GCSE results in 2005 and provisional results for 2006 were both below average overall. However, the numbers of students gaining at least five A* to C grades has improved markedly in 2006, continuing the upward trend of recent years. There has also been an improvement in the numbers of students gaining higher grades in mathematics and

English. Students' achievement was satisfactory in 2005 but improved results in 2006 and inspection evidence confirm students' achievement to be good.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive constructive individual support from teachers and teaching assistants. Although there are variations from year-to-year there are no consistent differences in the progress of boys and girls. Standards and achievement have risen because the school has rigorously tackled weaker subject areas. This has successfully brought about improvements in leadership and management and teaching and learning in departments such as English. Furthermore, the schools' specialist sports college status and excellent facilities promotes high levels of participation and achievement in a wide range of sports.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Most enjoy school, benefiting from the extensive range of academic and sporting opportunities, which the school provides. Students appreciate extra-curricular activities offered and take up is good. Many students feel their academic work is helped by their sporting activities. As one student commented, 'It gets your brain going.' Students enjoy the 'Benfield Excelling Student Team' programme which enables those participating to make very good and outstanding progress in sport by working with qualified coaches using excellent facilities.

Behaviour is good and often very good. Most students demonstrate very positive attitudes to their work, taking great pride in what they do and in their school. Students take advantage of the very good opportunities to participate in health related activities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and is developed well through religious education and personal, social, health, and citizenship education. Students willingly engage with the wider community in the excellent opportunities including work placements, dance festivals and as cheerleaders for the city's basketball team. In addition, students become sports coaches, represent their year group on the school council, become buddies for new students and receive the 'honour' of becoming a prefect.

Attendance has improved in recent years, although rates remain below average. Nonetheless, targets have been met ahead of schedule because monitoring is robust and actions are effective. The new attendance manager has further strengthened capacity, particularly in the targeting of first day absence. Students appreciate the very effective pastoral support they receive from education welfare staff and this is helping many to improve their attendance and become confident in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning is good overall in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form, a view shared by the school. Much effective work has been undertaken to improve teaching and learning and this continues to be pursued with determination, and some success, by the senior leadership team. Most lessons are well planned with clear objectives and this helps students to understand the purpose of a lesson and what is expected of them. However, not all teachers take enough account of what students already know and can do when lessons are prepared. Consequently, some students, and particularly those of the lowest ability in each class, are not always given work, which meets their learning needs and this restricts their progress.

Lessons are usually brisk and this helps to capture and maintain students' interest. Teachers use questioning effectively to engage students in discussion and this develops their thinking and helps students to understand key learning points. Students work well together with the large majority keen to accept responsibility for completing their tasks. As behaviour is good and well managed, this contributes significantly to the positive atmosphere in most lessons and does much to support students' learning.

Teachers are confident users of electronic whiteboards and these are well used to engage students' interest. However, there are insufficient opportunities for students to use them to support their learning within lessons. The marking of students' work is inconsistent. Where it is good, it helps students to understand how well they have done and what is required to improve further. Good examples are rare however, and this remains a significant area to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum contributes effectively to students' good overall achievement and aspects of the vocational programme have been particularly successful. A significant strength of the school is its provision for work-based learning such as the highly successful 'Skillforce' programme, and the more recent 'Building Buddies' partnership with a building company and another local school.

All statutory requirements are met. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is effective in meeting the needs of all students. Students chose a vocational option and this is effective in achieving higher standards in Years 10 and 11. The school's specialist sports provision makes a significant contribution to students' achievement, not only in sport and physical education, but in the positive impact it has on students' attitudes towards their learning in general and the manner in which it helps them accept personal responsibility for their conduct. Students make very good use of the study support

programme, which occurs mainly after school, and the broad variety of enrichment activities for those students identified as gifted and talented.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students receive an outstanding level of care and good guidance and support in the main school. This has a substantial impact on students' achievements, their well-being and behaviour. It is satisfactory in the sixth form. Child protection procedures and risk assessments are securely in place. The 'Teenage Drop-In Centre,' provides very good advice and support on staying safe and being healthy. Less confident students make use of the very effective support offered by education welfare staff. Students say they feel safe and free from bullying and harassment and have confidence in the help they receive. The school demonstrates great commitment to the well-being of all its students. There have been no permanent exclusions within the last 12 months and the provision which the school makes to support vulnerable students and those at risk from exclusion is very good.

Students' achievements are celebrated through displays and rewards, which the students value highly. Significantly, this includes those physically disabled students who attend the additional resource centre and who are fully integrated into the life of the school. Students' progress is monitored effectively and the school's ability to identify underachievement is becoming increasingly insightful. However, not all staff utilise this information to provide for the full range of learners' needs within lessons. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in particular, are well supported by an effective team of learning support assistants and teachers and this helps them to make good progress. The increasing number of students joining the school from abroad are well supported overall. For example, they receive immediate help from a teacher and learning support assistant and are provided with a student buddy to help them settle in. However, resources are limited to meet their needs fully and not all students receive the level of support they require in lessons. Although the school is making strident efforts to improve matters, more needs to be achieved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good and continue to improve. The headteacher's highly effective leadership has created a clear focus on raising standards and high ambition for all students. He is supported by a very able and committed senior leadership team and governing body.

The school has made excellent progress in developing its monitoring procedures. Accountability has been significantly strengthened and subject leaders are now much more responsible for the work of their departments. The introduction of departmental

reviews and direct line management by senior leaders is providing the school with a clear understanding of its strengths and where improvement is required. The school is now able to accurately highlight those departments which are underperforming. Senior leaders are able to target precise actions to bring about improvement and with some notable success. Nonetheless, in relation to some departments much progress remains to be achieved.

The governing body's clear sense of loyalty and commitment to improvement supports the school well. Governors work successfully alongside the leadership team. They are active in monitoring the school's performance and use timely and accurate information as the basis for making informed decisions.

Financial management of the school's various funding streams is good because of the rigour with which budget monitoring occurs and because actions are carefully costed and accurately aligned to where improvement is required. Much time and energy has been spent in consultations about the school's future, since the school is about to undergo further substantial change to its buildings and facilities. Nevertheless, the school's leadership team and governors have ensured that their focus on raising standards has been maintained. Spending decisions reflect improvement priorities well while ensuring that the existing buildings are maintained to a high standard.

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Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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	4	
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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The Students

Benfield School

Benfield Road

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tyne and Wear

NE6 4NU

19 October 2006

Dear Students

The inspection team would like to thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school to carry out the inspection on the 17 and 18 October 2006. Your willingness to talk about your school and what it does greatly helped us in our work. Our particular thanks go to those of you who gave up their lunch break to answer our questions. Your conduct gave us a very good impression of Benfield School.

The report is now complete and I would like to tell you what it contains.

Firstly, you helped us considerably in coming to our judgement that Benfield is a good school. We also think that its sporting provision, the way the school supports aspects of your personal development and the manner in which the school cares for your pastoral welfare are excellent. We consider this to be the case because of:

- the good progress which you are making in many subjects
- the way the school is helping you to stay healthy and be safe
- your outstanding achievements in sport
- the way in which the school's curriculum caters for your needs and the opportunities which are available to you
- the good teaching we saw in all parts of the school
- the good leadership which your headteacher and senior staff provide and their great determination to make Benfield an even better school in the future.

We have asked Mr Brumby, the governors and staff to concentrate on making three areas better. These are:

- to make sure that the work which you are given in class meets the needs of all students and particularly those in each class who find most difficulty with their learning
- that when marking your work, staff always provide you with information which shows you what to do next to improve
- make sure that all the subject departments in your school are as good as the very best.

Please thank your parents for the very helpful comments which they provided for us. The large majority clearly like your school and think as highly of it as you do.

Please accept our very best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector