



Belmont School Community Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114308
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289873
Inspection dates 11–12 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mary Sewell

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Buckinghamshire Road
School category	Community		Belmont, Durham
Age range of pupils	11–16		County Durham, DH1 2QP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 3865715
Number on roll (school)	815	Fax number	0191 3840583
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Councillor Ray Pye
		Headteacher	Miss Judith Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2001		

Age group 11–16	Inspection dates 11–12 January 2007	Inspection number 289873
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Belmont School is average sized and serves Durham City. It has Performing Arts College status, Sportsmark, Artsmark Gold and the Healthy Schools Award. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is lower than average, as is the proportion cared for by the local authority. The number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. This is because the school has a resource base for visually or hearing impaired students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation that it is satisfactory with several good features. It is a rapidly improving school, which offers its students a satisfactory education. There is a clear commitment to improvement and the school provides a very welcoming, orderly and safe environment for its students. Students feel happy and secure because staff take good care of them and relationships are very supportive. Students who have visual or hearing impairments hold the school in the highest regard and they make good progress. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

Students' personal development is good. Students appreciate the importance of safety and living a healthy lifestyle. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school council is active and effective in bringing about change and improvements for students. Considerable fundraising for local charities and involvement in professional theatre and with primary schools reflects students' awareness of the wider community. Students are well prepared for their futures. They develop secure skills of literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) and numeracy and learn to work cooperatively in lessons.

Students' examination and test results are broadly average, although performance and achievement vary between unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3 to good in Key Stage 4. In 2006, GCSE results were much improved which meant that these students had achieved well from their starting points in Year 7. The proportion of students attaining the higher grades was average. Improvement since the last inspection, which has largely focused on raising standards, had been slow until this improvement in 2006. Standards and achievement need to be improved further.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Some lessons are good or outstanding. Most lessons are well organised but some do not challenge students enough. In particular, higher attaining students are failing to reach their full potential in some subjects. The curriculum offered is now good and extra-curricular provision is very good. The school has introduced a number of curriculum innovations intended to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Some of these are proving very effective, notably the vocational courses and the provision of AS level Performing Arts for students in Year 11. The school's status as a Performing Arts College has helped students develop a culture of participation. It has also had a positive effect on the relationships with nearby primary schools and sixth forms. The school has met its challenging targets.

Students are well cared for, especially those based in the resource base unit. Students have a clear understanding of what standards they are capable of reaching. Parents are generally positive about the school but some raised concerns about silly disruptive behaviour in some lessons. This was confirmed by the inspectors but behaviour overall is good around the school and in the majority of lessons. The school is very effective in the measures taken to ensure the safety and happiness of all vulnerable students especially those who are visually or hearing impaired.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is a very good leader who has quite rightly identified the need to introduce more rigorous monitoring

procedures and to develop a clear, shared understanding about what constitutes high quality education. The relatively recent training of middle managers is beginning to have an impact upon the effective monitoring of the school. Middle managers are aware that the shared focus is on raising achievement. However, inconsistencies remain between departments and several are still inadequately managed. Self evaluation procedures are satisfactorily identifying the schools' strengths and weaknesses. This has led to a strong programme of professional development. The capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- Promote higher levels of expectation and challenge in teaching and learning.
- Increase the involvement of middle managers in evaluating the work of the school and leading improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The standards attained by students when they enter in Year 7 are broadly average. Their overall achievement is satisfactory. However, there is a difference between the achievement of students in Key Stage 3, which is less than satisfactory, and in Key Stage 4 where achievement in 2006 improved considerably and was good. Standards at Key Stage 3 are below national expectations and achievement is unsatisfactory. This is largely due to poor test results in English, which did not reflect previous performance in this subject area.

GCSE results were just above the national average in 2006. This represents rapid improvement and is the direct result of a thorough review of teaching and learning following poor results in 2005. The school introduced a revised curriculum and various strategies to support learning. This resulted in much improved results in 2006 and has raised standards in the current Years 9 and 11. These year groups are well on course to meet their challenging targets. Significant strengths in some subjects, for example business studies and leisure and tourism, reflect the success of these relatively new curriculum options.

The school's specialist status has impacted positively on students' progress and many are achieving success in GCSE in Year 9 and in GCE AS level courses in Year 11 in performing arts. In 2006, the school focused on the highest attaining students and many more of the highest grades were awarded. However, insufficient numbers are reaching their predicted grades in geography and French as compared to students nationally. Girls attained higher levels and grades than boys until 2006, when the gap between them narrowed in a large number of subjects.

These improvements are because school has acted quickly to overcome staffing and curriculum difficulties and standards are rising. Students with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities and students considered more vulnerable are well supported and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is developed effectively through the curriculum. Assemblies promote the school's positive ethos but tutor periods vary in their effectiveness and contribution.

Students enjoy school, attend regularly, have positive relationships and are keen to learn. The school is a friendly, well ordered community because there is an unequivocal code of conduct. Students are responding positively to the school's clear expectations but some parental concerns about a small number of students disrupting lessons are valid. Until recently, student misbehaviour had resulted in a high number of temporary exclusions. A new inclusion unit combined with staff training and an alternative curriculum have been successful in sharply reducing poor behaviour and the use of exclusion as a sanction.

Students make positive contributions to the school and wider community, for example through their fundraising activities. They value the good range of opportunities to take responsibility by serving on the school council and as prefects. Students are confident that their views are taken seriously and they are proud of their effectiveness in bringing about healthier school meals and outdoor seating areas.

Students are developing a good awareness of the importance of a healthy and safe lifestyle. A large number are involved in sport, dance and performing arts events after school. Careers advice, links with local employers, and a range of vocational courses provide students with useful skills and knowledge and prepare them effectively for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning in the school is satisfactory overall with some good and outstanding features. Many teachers have good levels of subject knowledge and use this to plan and deliver lessons in which good learning takes place. In these lessons, high expectations combined with good use of ICT, promote challenge and increase student motivation and concentration.

Teachers assess effectively and use previous assessments to plan tasks to match students' varying needs. In the best lessons, students are well supported in their development of literacy and numeracy skills and are given opportunities to work on their own and in groups. In one such lesson, the students choreographed a dance sequence, which resulted in high quality performances. Careful and sensitive planning

ensures that students who are visually or hearing impaired are well supported and make good progress, as in a technology lesson in which students learned how to use tools correctly.

The teaching and learning strategies being recently put into place by the school are clearly beginning to have an impact in a large number of lessons. However, in lessons where the school planning format is not used effectively or where insufficient account is taken of what the student can already do, the teaching is not sufficiently challenging and learning is less secure. In too many lessons, expectations are not high enough and teaching and learning, although satisfactory, is not rigorous enough to be good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a good range and balance of opportunities and experiences for all students. Innovative arrangements to teach citizenship through the 'challenge days' programme enhance their personal development. Excellent provision in the performing arts involves many students in dance and drama and they clearly enjoy their achievement and accomplishments. Recently introduced vocational courses and productive links with local post-16 colleges make the curriculum relevant for students who have particular aptitudes. The school very successfully ensures that every student, including those with hearing or visual impairments, is able to take part in all subjects and other activities, and to have a real sense of success. The school fully meets its statutory obligations.

The school supports its students' culture of participation. A wide range of well-attended after-school activities makes a good contribution to their physical, health, and social development. Students willingly become involved in sport, music, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, scouts and guides, army cadets and in community activities, all of which enhance their development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of students are good. There is a good level of commitment to their welfare. The procedures for child protection are in place and understood by staff. Systems for risk assessment are very well managed. Students say they feel safe and appreciate the action taken by the school to deal with issues such as bullying.

Strong partnerships with outside agencies help to provide sensitive care and support for vulnerable students. Learning support assistants give consistently good help to students with additional learning difficulties, including those with visual or hearing impairment. As a result, these students make particularly good progress. Good links with primary schools smooth the transfer of Year 7 students into their new school. The guidance programme ensures that students receive good support and information when making their subject choices at the end of Year 9, and when deciding on their subsequent career and post-16 educational opportunities. Effective links are maintained

with parents through regular reports and parents' meetings. Most are satisfied with the school; they and their children acknowledge the good care provided by staff.

Academic progress is closely tracked across the school, and this is helping to improve performance. Students know their targets and how to improve their work. Those likely to do less well than they should are quickly identified and effective support is provided to bring them back on track in most subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher works with senior leaders to give the school a clear educational direction, which is strongly focused on raising standards and improving the quality of provision. Her strong leadership has already resulted in considerable improvements in behaviour. Achievement in Key Stage 4 shows clear signs of improvement and her promotion of equality of opportunity has resulted in the near disappearance of the gap between girls' and boys' performance.

She has a thorough knowledge of her school and its staff as a result of the excellent systems put in place. The usefulness of self-evaluation is increasing as her judgements become sharper, helping her to pinpoint the areas that can best contribute to improvement. She has secured the respect of staff, the great majority of whom work to ensure the success of her policies.

Progress towards targets has been slow because of staffing difficulties but these have been well managed and staffing is now stable. The leadership team has wisely provided the training needed to promote greater effectiveness in the work of middle managers. There remains inconsistency and not all areas of the curriculum are well managed. The strategies put into place to raise standards in Key Stage 4 are now being applied throughout the school.

Governors are well informed and supportive. They have strong associations with curriculum areas and have regular meetings with heads of department.

Governors fully comply with current requirements. The school is highly inclusive and the integration of children who work in the visually-impaired and hearing-impaired unit is especially good. Finances are well managed and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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?	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	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Belmont School Community Arts College

Buckinghamshire Road

Belmont

Durham

County Durham

DH1 2QP

11 January 2007

Dear Students

It was a pleasure to visit your school this week.

We were pleased with the way in which you behave as mature and sensible members of the school community. We found that apart from one or two individuals your behaviour is good and that you enjoy coming to school. Your governors, headteacher and other senior teachers run your school effectively and are trying to make all of you understand how important it is you attend school regularly, equipped and ready for work.

You told us that your teachers encourage you to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. We were also very pleased to see large numbers of you learning to dance, play table tennis, the classical guitar, and chess at lunchtime. Thanks to those of you who came to speak with us on Thursday. We agree with you that most of your teaching helps you to learn well, and in some lessons you learn very quickly. Nearly all of you understood your learning targets and were able to explain to us what you needed to do to improve your work.

We have asked the governors and headteacher to improve one or two things for you. We would like many more of you to do better in English, mathematics and science especially in Key Stage 3. It is especially important that those of you who can achieve the highest grades in GCSE examinations do so. We have asked teachers to set more challenging work for you so that you are more prepared to get higher marks. We have asked that those teachers who lead departments are involved more in checking how well the school is performing and how it could be improved.

We wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Mary Sewell, Andrew Henderson, Graeme Clarke and Nigel Cromey-Hawke