

Beacon Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114585
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	289983
Inspection dates	21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1779
6th form	353
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Greville Rumble
Headteacher	P Swan
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2001
School address	East Beeches Road Crowborough TN6 2AS
Telephone number	01892 603000
Fax number	01892 603001

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Beacon Community College is a very large school that draws most of its students from Crowborough and the surrounding villages but substantial numbers in some year groups come from Kent. Almost 95% of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average. The school has been a specialist sports college since 1997 and gained a second specialism for science in 2004. The school was awarded Training College status in 2003. The school was undergoing major building work at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Beacon Community College provides a satisfactory standard of education and care for its students and is capable of making further improvement. The school has several important strengths, such as its good sixth form provision, and no major area of its work is unsatisfactory. Students generally enjoy their education and feel the school provides a friendly and safe environment and does its best to meet their individual needs. Relationships between students and staff are good, resulting in a strong element of trust. Most students have positive attitudes to learning and attend well. The great majority of students behave well but there are a small number of incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour and parents expressed concern about these.

Students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11, attaining examination results that are in line with national averages. Achievement is not better than this because there is insufficient teaching that is consistently good. Most teaching is satisfactory or better and some is outstanding. In the less effective lessons students are set tasks that do not fully engage and challenge them. The quality of marking is also too variable, resulting in students not always knowing what they need to do to improve their work.

High quality care, guidance and support and a curriculum aimed at meeting individual needs result in students' personal development being good. The sports specialism is having a major impact on helping students lead healthy lives and involving them in the local community. Students are well prepared for further education and future employment through a strong programme of careers guidance and work-related learning, including taking part in enterprise activities.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Progress in raising achievement since the last inspection has been hampered by a high turnover of staff and accommodation difficulties. Staffing is now more stable, the accommodation has been reorganised and a major building programme is underway. More rigorous systems for monitoring students' progress and the quality of teaching have been introduced. Senior managers are making good use of the information provided by monitoring but it is not used effectively by all subject leaders to improve teaching and raise achievement. Appropriate policies are in place to improve teaching, behaviour and assessing students' progress but these are not yet being implemented consistently by all staff. The impact of the school's science specialism in bringing about improvement across the school is developing too slowly.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education for its students. The curriculum is well planned and students have a wide choice of academic and vocational courses that are designed to meet their individual needs. Teaching is good and the quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Leadership and management are very good. All these factors contribute to students making good progress and achieving well. Examination results are in line with national averages and the proportion of students completing courses is high. Substantial numbers go on to university, with the great majority being offered their first choice place. Students' personal development is good and they are very well prepared for higher education and employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of heads of department in improving teaching and learning and raising achievement in their subjects.
- Ensure that students are set tasks in all lessons that fully challenge and engage them, and improve the quality of marking.
- Develop the science specialism more effectively to raise standards and achievement across the school.
- Ensure that the policies for behaviour, teaching and learning and assessing students' progress are implemented consistently by all staff.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average. They make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11 and good progress in the sixth form. Progress is more rapid in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 to 11 and the proportion of students achieving higher levels in tests at the end of Year 9 is above average. Examination results in Year 11 and in the sixth form are similar to those found nationally. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11 and good progress in the sixth form. There is some underachievement by boys throughout the school, including the sixth form. Strategies such as earlier intervention when boys are falling behind with their work are proving successful, and the most recent data indicate a narrowing of the gap between the performance of boys and girls. Despite a recent improvement in GCSE results, they are still below the challenging targets the school has set itself.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The great majority of students enjoy their education, have good attitudes to learning and feel safe and well cared for. This is reflected in above average levels of attendance and over three-quarters of students choosing to stay on in the school's sixth form.

Behaviour seen in lessons and around the school during the inspection was good. Permanent exclusions are rare but the number of fixed term exclusions, although falling, indicates some continued poor behaviour by a small minority of students. Relationships between students and between staff and students are good. As one Year 9 student said, 'People are the best thing about the school.' Students find teachers and other staff accessible and supportive. Most agree that there is at least one adult with whom they feel confident in discussing personal concerns. Students are able to make their views known through the year group and school councils and two students attend governing body meetings as associate governors. Students have been influential in decisions on uniforms, lunch arrangements and access to buildings but few feel involved in the more major decisions, for example in planning the new accommodation.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students regularly raise funds for a wide variety of charities at home and abroad. Sixth form students' appreciation of the needs of others is enhanced very effectively through the strong links they have developed with a Gambian village. Students' involvement in the community is promoted through their

work in primary schools and a local special school to develop sport. Students understand and value the system of rewards and sanctions. Sixth form students have relatively little involvement in supporting younger students, and students throughout the school feel there should be more opportunities to exercise responsibility. Students have too little time for spiritual reflection beyond assemblies and religious education.

Students are well aware of the importance of exercise and good nutrition and understand how to lead healthy lifestyles, as well as the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. High proportions of students of both sexes are involved in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting and other fitness-related activities. There is good access to drinking water at all times and there is a good take-up of the wide range of healthy food provided in the canteen. The school's emphasis on health and fitness is reflected in it achieving the Sports Mark Gold Award with distinction.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is good in the sixth form. A range of teaching was observed during the inspection, including some that was outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and most follow the school's policy on minimum teaching standards, but this is not implemented consistently. Lessons are carefully planned and behaviour is generally managed appropriately. In a few lessons students misbehave when they are set inappropriate and uninteresting tasks. Good use is made of teaching and other assistants to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities. In the best lessons, teachers know their students very well and provide challenging work for students with differing needs. Students remain on task, are fully involved and are confident in their ability to improve. They take responsibility for their learning, work independently and participate in whole class and group discussion. They mark their own and others' work, give constructive feedback and have very positive attitudes. In the less successful lessons teachers tend to talk too much, work proceeds too slowly and students respond passively, rather than being actively engaged in their learning. Work in these lessons is not always demanding enough or appropriate to the needs of different groups of learners. The quality of marking varies too much. Some work is marked well and students know exactly what they must do to improve, but in others, there are too few marks or comments to be helpful.

The school places a strong emphasis on improving teaching and learning through making new appointments and through professional development, including using external support and its own advanced skills teachers to share good practice. There is evidence that this is starting to have an impact but it is still early days.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are provided with a good curriculum throughout the school. An increasing range of flexible vocational and academic options in Years 10 to 11 and in the sixth form helps to raise achievement and improve motivation. The school has pioneered, in collaboration with other local providers, the setting up of a very successful vocational skills centre where a number of

students spend part of their week. There is good provision for students who are at risk of dropping out of education or being permanently excluded. The highest attaining students are well provided for through enrichment activities, early examination entry and taking courses such as GCE AS critical thinking in Year 11. The school has substantially improved its provision of information and communication technology, an area identified as being unsatisfactory in the last inspection report. There is a good and popular range of extra-curricular activities, although those for sixth form students, beyond sport, are more limited. The school has made good use of its sports specialism to enrich the curriculum but its science specialism is not yet having sufficient impact.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are good. They are outstanding in the sixth form. Good liaison with local primary schools helps new students settle rapidly into Year 7. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and other vulnerable students are well supported and cared for so they make at least satisfactory academic progress. Wheelchair access is currently restricted because of the nature of the buildings. The school tries to ensure that the full curriculum is available to all students and the rebuilding plans take wheelchair access fully into account. The school has appropriate health and safety and child protection procedures in place. Incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare but are dealt with effectively when reported to staff. A recently developed system of training students to act as mentors to younger students is starting to prove effective in identifying and dealing with bullying and other concerns. Procedures for monitoring students' personal and academic progress are robust and interventions are made at an early stage if students appear to be encountering difficulties. Reporting on progress to students and their parents is regular and thorough.

There are good links with an extensive range of external services and agencies, which ensure the well-being of students. Specialist counselling facilities within the school provide effective support for students experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. Students are given good quality advice and guidance to help them make decisions about their choice of courses in Year 10 and for post-16 education, training and employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers at all levels have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school based on a range of data, observations of teaching and the views of parents and external agencies. Governors provide good support and are prepared to challenge senior managers about performance. They have a good knowledge of the school based on visits and regular meetings with staff. The responsibilities and accountabilities of staff are clear and their performance is monitored closely. Key policies are in place but are not always implemented consistently, particularly those relating to managing behaviour, teaching and learning and marking. Actions taken to improve teaching, the accommodation and the curriculum are starting to have an impact on raising achievement. The effectiveness of subject leaders in raising achievement is too variable. Some make very good

use of the information from lesson observations and performance data to bring about improvements in teaching and learning but this is not sufficiently consistent. The school works effectively with other providers, external agencies and the local authority to benefit its students. The school regularly canvasses parents' views through questionnaires and other methods but a significant minority of parents feel they are not consulted sufficiently and not enough account is taken of their concerns. The school uses its resources efficiently and 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.

Annex A

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

Achievement and standards

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

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	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
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	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
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	3	
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	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

Thank you for the help you gave us with the recent inspection of your school and for the polite and friendly way you received us. Our overall finding is that your school provides a satisfactory standard of education and that it has a number of strengths. The quality of education provided in the sixth form is good. Most of you told us that you enjoy coming to school and feel safe. The great majority of you have good attendance and behave well and care for each other.

- Other things we particularly liked about your school were:
- The way you lead healthy lifestyles and participate in the excellent range of sports and other fitness activities.
- The good care and support you are given to help you succeed in school and in later life.
- The extensive choice of subjects and courses that are available to older students.
- The way the school tries to meet your individual needs.
- We have asked your school to make some improvements, and these are:
- All teachers need to consistently set tasks that you find challenging and interesting and make it clear when they mark your work what you need to do to improve.
- Some heads of department need help in improving teaching and learning and raising achievement in their subjects.
- The policies on behaviour, assessing your progress and what should take place in lessons need to be applied in the same way by all teachers.
- Your school is making very good use of the extra funding it receives for sport but more needs to be done to develop its second specialism in science.

We feel the staff and governors have the skills to make your school even better in the future and we hope you will play your part in this. Thank you again for all your help in the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.