



Beacon School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119898
Local Authority Lancashire
Inspection number 291560
Inspection date 16 January 2007
Reporting inspector Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Tanhouse Road
School category	Community special		Tanhouse, Skelmersdale
Age range of pupils	5-16		Lancashire, WN8 6BA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01695 721066
Number on roll (school)	66	Fax number	01695 732932
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr William Hodgson
		Headteacher	Ms Angela Lazarevic
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school for pupils with above average behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. Most pupils are White British. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority. Many pupils travel considerable distances to get to school.

The County Council has been reviewing special educational needs provision for several years. It proposes to re-designate Beacon School as a secondary special school from 1 September 2008 and open a new community special school for primary age pupils on an adjacent site. The proposals were made public a few days before the inspection.

Over the past year, the school has been led, at various times, by a headteacher, an acting headteacher and two associate headteachers. The current associate headteacher has been in post for two weeks.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some important good features. Parents' views vary widely, from openly critical to extremely grateful. Most, however, are supportive. Pupils achieve well because teaching is good. The nature of pupils' difficulties means that standards are below those found in mainstream schools, but many pupils gain GCSE passes at the end of Year 11. Primary pupils make similar good progress in all subjects but secondary pupils achieve better in English than in mathematics. Progress sometimes falters in Year 7 because pupils are not well enough prepared for differences in the curriculum between the primary and secondary departments. Good plans have recently been put in place to address this issue.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance is satisfactory and pupils usually work hard and with enthusiasm. Most, but not all, parents rightly agree that their children are kept safe and well protected. Careful checks are kept on the suitability of staff for working with vulnerable children. The school strongly encourages pupils to participate in energetic activities and to lead healthy lives. It gained a national Healthy Schools Award in 2005. All but one of last year's leavers gained a GCSE pass in physical education. Regular testing helps teachers to keep a check on pupils' progress but there is not enough analysis of this progress over the years that pupils spend at school, with the result that patterns of progress are not sufficiently identified. This reduces the effectiveness of the school's monitoring and evaluation of its provision.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It broadly follows the requirements of the National Curriculum but at the moment does not provide for a modern foreign language for Key Stage 3 pupils because, despite considerable effort, it has not been able to appoint a suitable teacher. Most activities are well matched to the needs of individuals but not enough is done to enrich the curriculum by taking learning out of the classroom. Older pupils have satisfactory opportunities to learn about life in the workplace and all of last year's leavers successfully completed work experience. Along with their good academic progress this is preparing them well for the future. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school community but their involvement in the broader community is limited.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Upheavals over the past year have not been allowed to affect pupils' learning and personal development. This reflects the stability and strength of middle management. The governing body involves itself satisfactorily in monitoring and evaluating provision but has not acted with sufficient speed or effectiveness to appoint a headteacher to see the school through the current period of reorganisation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Treat with more urgency the appointment of a headteacher.
- Take steps to raise standards in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Use assessment information more systematically to check pupils' progress throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including the small minority of girls, achieve well. Attainment on entry is usually low and often very low. This is usually because pupils' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have interfered with their early learning. Increasingly, many pupils are also showing a greater than usual degree of learning difficulty. The school succeeds in helping most pupils to overcome their difficulties and through good teaching helps them to make good academic progress. Six pupils left at the end of Year 11 last year. Between them they gained 36 GCSE passes. Three pupils gained five or more passes, all including English and mathematics. Passes are usually at the lower end of the scale but three pupils gained a 'C' grade in either design and technology or physical education. All pupils also gained a nationally recognised qualification in computer literacy and information technology. Fewer pupils are entered for mathematics GCSE than for English and the evidence of inspection supports the school's view that in Key Stages 3 and 4, achievement in mathematics is lower than in English.

Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 achieve well. Their academic progress is sometimes slower than in Key Stage 4 because it is the period when they are newest to the school and their personal difficulties are most pronounced. Tests at the end of Year 6 show that about a half of all pupils attained a standard which is one level below the national average. The other half does not reach the level expected of pupils four years younger. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. It is slowed, particularly in Year 7, by pupils struggling to adapt to the change from a primary style of class teaching to a secondary one with several teachers. By the end of Year 9, it is rare for pupils to exceed the level expected of pupils three years younger.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. So is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is usually settled, but many individual pupils experience crises, which result in disruption to their learning and, occasionally, in outbursts of unpleasant behaviour. There were 50 exclusions last year, nearly all for short periods. Attendance is satisfactory. Most pupils attend when they can because they enjoy coming to school. Last term 10 primary age pupils received certificates for 100% attendance. Several older pupils talked confidently and politely to the inspector expressing the view that the school was helping them to have better futures. Improvements in their basic skills and their successful participation in work experience suggest that this is the case. Most pupils show a satisfactory awareness of safety but irrational behaviour occasionally puts others at risk. Pupils meet with success in developing healthier lifestyles, many enjoy their physical and adventure activities but smoking still causes problems. Pupils feel involved in making decisions to improve the school. Their good contribution to the development of rewards and sanctions demonstrates their growing awareness of moral and social issues. Their contribution to the broader community is more limited.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning is helping pupils to make good academic progress. Teachers are well prepared and teamwork between classroom staff is good and well organised. Expectations are high for both learning and behaviour. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to supporting pupils in their learning and behaviour. Classrooms are usually settled because teachers recognise that the best way to prevent disruption is to keep pupils working hard. As a result, the pace of lessons is usually good. Pupils who are struggling to behave are frequently removed from class or remove themselves voluntarily to 'time out'. Work usually follows them and, whilst the interruption sometimes slows individual learning, it allows the majority of pupils to carry on with their work undisturbed. Occasionally, to the detriment of teaching and learning, this 'time out' is used as a first choice rather than a last option after other strategies have been tried. Teachers have rapidly picked up skills of using interactive whiteboards to present work in a way which captures and keeps the attention of pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. There is often an air of informality but teachers are good at keeping this within bounds and recognising when pupils are using friendly chatter as a means of avoiding work. The evidence of inspection supports the school's view that teaching is good in Key Stages 1 and 2, that English is particularly well taught in Key Stages 3 and 4 and that the teaching of mathematics is satisfactory for this group.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It successfully caters for the specific needs of individuals, many of whom have been unable to succeed in other schools. The curriculum for primary age pupils follows the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. It includes good opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills. The curriculum for senior pupils successfully promotes basic skills and balances this well with science, physical education, design technology and art, all of which are accredited at GCSE level. A modern foreign language is not currently taught. Work-related learning is satisfactory. All pupils successfully completed work experience last year, there are satisfactory links with the careers advice agency 'Connexions' and pupils have satisfactory opportunities to attend college to study subjects as diverse as hairdressing and mechanics. However, there are not enough enrichment activities for pupils to develop individual interests and talents. The distances pupils have to travel to school each day curtails after-school activities and there are few educational visits or visitors. All pupils are taught religious education. The school has identified the need to improve planning aimed at smoothing the path from a primary to a secondary curriculum in Years 6 and 7 and has planned well to achieve this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. Staff are highly committed to ensuring that pupils stay safe and are well looked after and share a good awareness of the importance of protecting pupils. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and up to date. Governors take the monitoring of health and safety standards seriously. Potential risk is always assessed to avoid accidents. This assessment covers individual pupils as well as activities. The school tries hard, but does not always succeed, in engaging parents in their children's education. It has also encountered difficulties in working with other support agencies. Most of these problems are not of the school's making but it recognises the need to persevere in order to improve the care and support of pupils.

Teachers have a good understanding of pupils. They are able to prepare suitably varied work for individuals to ensure that all have equal opportunities to make progress. Assessment is wide ranging and frequent but does not result in a clear picture of pupils' progress as they pass through the school. All pupils have comprehensive assessment files but the information in them is not easily interpreted. There is currently no single system to show where, in academic or developmental terms, pupils are, came from or are expected to get to at the next stage. This weakens the school's capacity to monitor its effectiveness and to provide better guidance to pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The fact that changes at the top of the leadership and management ladder have not affected teaching and learning bears testament to the good quality of the next level of management. The deputy headteacher has successfully bridged the gap between successive head and associate headteachers; departmental heads have maintained continuity and subject leaders have ensured that standards are being maintained. The school has had a very unsettled recent past, following many years of stability. It is entering a period of huge change without an established leader responsible for seeing this change through to its conclusion. The governing body is in a difficult position but has not reacted with sufficient urgency to address this. In other respects, the governing body has contributed considerably to the effectiveness of the school. It has been actively involved in monitoring the ethos of the school, health and safety standards and the quality of lessons.

There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have risen but accommodation remains inadequate. The school maintains a satisfactory capacity to improve, helped by an awareness of where improvements can be made but hindered by the failure to appoint a headteacher to see them through. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. It is consistent but somewhat over-optimistic, with too much comfort being taken from past successes and not enough acknowledgements of possible future

problems. Self-evaluation is aided by good monitoring of teaching and learning but weakened by only satisfactory monitoring of pupils' progress.

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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?	3
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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	3
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

Beacon School

Tanhouse Road

Tanhouse

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

WN8 6BA

18 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Some of you may remember me visiting in the other day. I saw quite a few of your lessons and enjoyed brief chats with one or two of you.

I enjoyed my visit. I like your sort of school and have the privilege of visiting lots of them. That gives me a good idea about how good your school is. It's more or less in the middle, some good things, some not so good. That's what we call satisfactory.

The important thing is that you're well taught and if you choose to work hard you will do well, so that when you leave you should have a pocketful of GCSEs.

I know it's difficult, but try to behave. Most of you do so most of the time. Sometimes it all goes wrong but it's good to see how well you usually respond to the help you're given.

It's my job to give the schools I visit a few suggestions as to how they could help you do better in school. Your new headteacher has already sorted a few but I noticed that you could be doing better in mathematics in Years 7 – 11 and that it's not easy to see whether you achieved as much as was expected of you before you leave.

You've had a lot of headteachers over the last year. I hope the rate of change slows down.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector