



Beech House School

Independent School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

DfES Registration Number 354/6001
Unique Reference Number 105855
Inspection number 299793
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mr Michael Best

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group 2-16	Published 12 February 2007	Reference no. 299793
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Beech House is a co-educational school for pupils aged three to sixteen years. There are 287 pupils on the school's roll. The school prepares pupils for transfer to other schools and colleges at 11+ and 16+. It occupies four substantial Victorian properties, converted for educational use, near the centre of Rochdale. The school was established in 1922 and has expanded in the last ten years with the acquisition of neighbouring properties and the nearby former Glebe House School building. The main school backs onto open ground which is used for sporting activities. A purpose-built sports hall and music room are nearing completion. The school aims to *'blend the best of traditional education with the skills and resources of the modern system to ensure that pupils' talents are exercised to the full'*. It seeks to *'uphold traditional values and behaviour providing a secure, caring and academically challenging environment'*.

Evaluation of the school

Beech House is a good school that fulfils its aims. Parents and pupils are positive about the school's work. Through a good range of curricular and other activities, pupils develop confidence and self-esteem and are effectively prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes enjoy a broad range of activities covering all the recommended areas of learning. There is a good balance between child-chosen and adult-directed activities, with a strong emphasis on developing children's communication and language skills. Children learn to work and play together in a happy and supportive setting. The provision in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 builds effectively on these good foundations and includes all subjects appropriate to pupils' needs, with a particular focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils use and apply their skills and knowledge in a range of different contexts.

The school's curriculum plans secure pupils' progress as they move through the school. In Key Stage 4, pupils choose from a broad range of academic and vocational subjects leading to the General Certificate of Secondary Education and other external qualifications. A significant proportion of pupils sit

examinations in English, mathematics and science up to two years earlier than usual, using the time then available to study other subjects or move on to the higher A/S level examinations. Older pupils undertake courses in careers education.

Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are good resources in the nursery and reception classes and in some specialist subjects, such as information and communication technology. However, some textbooks and library books are dated and, in some departments, resources are not effectively stored, reducing their accessibility. The quality of classroom display is not consistent; at its best, it provides pupils with well-presented examples of good quality work.

All pupils follow a programme of personal, social and health education which includes citizenship. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities in sport and the arts. Pupils regularly take part in competitive and friendly matches with other schools in many sports, including swimming. The school offers tuition and external examinations in music and speaking. A good range of visits and visitors supports pupils' learning. A strength of curriculum planning is the identification of opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and, across the school, there are examples of good and outstanding practice. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. They manage their lessons well and have a good rapport with their pupils. Pupils are keen and interested, and they try hard, producing neat and clear work. Practical lessons are generally well run with pupils actively involved, describing what they have seen and heard using the correct subject vocabulary and discussing the underlying concepts. In the Nursery and Reception classes, staff encourage children to develop good working habits by sharing equipment, discussing what they are doing and seeing an activity through to its conclusion. In this positive setting, children settle quickly into routines and make good progress.

In the best lessons, teachers make excellent use of questions and observations of pupils' practical and written work to reinforce and further develop knowledge and understanding. In these brisk, highly organised and productive lessons, pupils make good and often outstanding progress. Where teaching is only satisfactory, teachers do not sufficiently check up on how well pupils are progressing. As a result, pupils are not always challenged by their work and their progress is only satisfactory. The school does not have an agreed policy for teachers to assess pupils' progress and use this information to plan their next steps in learning. This does not meet requirements. Marking is not consistent in providing guidance to help pupils improve.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Behaviour is good. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and apply these fairly. Pupils respond well; they are polite, very well mannered and welcoming to visitors. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school because everyone is so friendly. In and out of lessons, they are confident and enthusiastic, keen to learn and willing to 'have a go'. They reflect carefully on what they see and hear, celebrate the contribution of other cultures, and give their support to charities. Pupils get on well with staff and each other, valuing each other's views and opinions. Younger pupils take on classroom jobs, such as taking the register to the office, while older pupils assume school-wide responsibilities, many as prefects. Residential trips and opportunities to represent the school in the arts and at sporting events provide good opportunities for pupils to develop as rounded and interesting young adults. Pupils successfully develop their understanding of local and national institutions and services through, for example, visits to the local courts.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. Staff know and care well for their pupils. Form tutors provide pastoral support for pupils and take overall responsibility for their personal development. The school has unambiguous policies for ensuring good behaviour and preventing bullying. Sanctions are clearly outlined and systematically applied when necessary. Supervision is good and the school works closely with parents. Pupils feel safe and say that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Pupils are encouraged to follow a healthy lifestyle, with plenty of opportunities to take part in physical activities. A healthy eating policy has been effectively introduced in the lower preparatory department.

The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy. An independent audit is undertaken annually and recommendations are acted upon. Fire alarms are tested weekly and there is a termly evacuation drill. Risk assessments are carried out for all visits away from school. The school's First Aid policy provides suitable guidance to staff. Following recent training, the number of trained First Aiders well exceeds requirements. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good, and nominated staff have recently updated their skills and knowledge in this area. The school has appropriate regard for the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. Registers are taken regularly and the school keeps its admission register up to date. However, the use of correcting fluid in these documents is contrary to the regulations.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate procedures for checking the identity, qualifications and suitability of new staff prior to their appointment. There are some gaps in the information recorded on a small minority of existing staff as details of their qualifications are obtained. The school is regularly monitoring the situation.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are of a satisfactory standard. The school is in the process of building a replacement sports hall. The standard of decoration of the Lower Preparatory department is good; in the main school, the standard of decoration in some areas is unsatisfactory and a number of classrooms require better lighting. The school has plans to remedy this once the current building works are completed. At present, the facilities for those who are ill do not meet the regulations. The school makes regular use of adjacent grassed areas for games lessons and sporting fixtures and uses local facilities for swimming and other activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information for parents and prospective parents is good. Regular newsletters are informative. Written reports, issued twice yearly, provide a clear picture of what each pupil has achieved, and the best reports give good guidance for further improvement. The prospectus is detailed and informative. It includes a list of additional documents parents may wish to consult but omits to mention parents' access to information about the number of complaints made in the previous school year.

Procedures for handling complaints

The majority of parents say they are comfortable about approaching the school with any problems but some are unaware of the school's complaints procedures. The school has recently revised its procedures for handling complaints and, with one exception, these meet regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

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- establish a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and utilise information from such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain the admission register and attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l))
- ensure satisfactory lighting in classrooms and other parts of the school satisfactory and in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(p))
- ensure a satisfactory standard and adequate maintenance of decoration (paragraph 5(q)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- make parents aware they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that the procedures provide that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- share good practice in teaching and learning, particularly the use of assessment to identify pupils' next steps in learning

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- improve the quality of the learning environment by ensuring that resources are clearly labelled and readily accessible and that displays of pupils' work are of a consistently high standard.

School details

Name of school	Beech House School
DfES number	354/6001
Unique reference number	105855
Type of school	All-age school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1922
Age range of pupils	2-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 133 Girls: 143 Total: 276
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 4 Girls: 7 Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,537 (Preparatory Department) £4,455 (Senior School)
Address of school	Beech House School 184 Manchester Road Rochdale Lancashire OL11 4JQ
Telephone number	01706 646309
Fax number	01704 860685
Email address	bschool119@aol.com
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Sartain
Proprietor	Beech House School Limited
Reporting inspector	Mr Michael Best
Dates of inspection	17-18 January 2007