

Beths Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101479
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307704
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2007
Reporting inspector	John Laver

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1159
6th form	360
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs R Webdale
Headteacher	Mr J Skinner
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2002
School address	Hartford Road Bexley DA5 1NE
Telephone number	01322 556538
Fax number	01322 526224

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Beths Grammar School is a larger than average selective boys' school which admits girls into the sixth form. The proportion of students from ethnic minorities is above average. The school has specialist status as a Technology and Languages College.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Beths Grammar provides an outstanding quality of education. Standards are well above average. Achievement is outstanding. Students achieve outstandingly by the age of 14. Although progress is very good between the ages of 14 and 16, a few students do not quite meet their challenging targets. Progress and achievement are again outstanding by the time students leave the sixth form, which includes a substantial number of girls, all of whom are well integrated into the school. Students throughout the school benefit from a combination of good teaching, an ethos that promotes outstanding personal development, outstanding care and guidance, and the very positive attitudes which students themselves bring to lessons and school life generally. Students and parents are very appreciative of the quality of what the school offers, both in terms of high standards and the richness of the curriculum. As one parent commented, 'Beths provides an environment where our son can fulfil his potential and provides an educational platform to go on to greater things.'

Particularly impressive is the way in which an outstanding leadership team, supported by very knowledgeable and constructively supportive governors, builds on existing successes by targeting areas for improvement. The school's self-evaluation, which follows on from careful monitoring, is very accurate: the few areas of relative underperformance are targeted, appropriate support is then put in place, and the resulting improvements are evident in excellent standards. The good progress made since the previous inspection and the commitment and targeted support already in place indicate that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve. It has correctly focused on improving teaching and achievement still further. Teaching and learning are good, mainly because most lessons are appropriately challenging. However, occasionally teachers are too controlling and miss opportunities to extend able students more directly.

The school provides a challenging and innovative curriculum. 'Fast tracking' Year 11 students into post-16 courses, sometimes alongside sixth formers, is highly motivating and promotes strong progress. Even in Year 7 the challenge is evident, for example in the provision of Mandarin: a lesson in this was seen during the inspection, with the students fully engaged and making impressive progress in developing language skills and understanding. The school's specialist status in technology and languages has a very positive impact on the breadth of the curriculum and students' motivation. For example, the application of information and communications technology (ICT) has improved considerably in recent years; and students also have opportunities to study a range of languages. The school reaches out into the community, for example with language courses offered to parents and local employers. There are excellent links with outside agencies and other institutions such as a special school, which give the students further opportunities to develop personal and social skills.

The school is very successful in promoting personal development. Students are articulate, involved and constructively critical of the school. They certainly enjoy school life, although some would like a more exciting approach in some lessons. One parent summed up the school's strength as 'developing the students as critical thinkers.' Students are a credit to the school in their behaviour, attendance and maturity.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The high performing, mixed, sixth form is very successful and is heavily oversubscribed, with an excellent retention rate. Students comment on the high quality of their induction and the 'strong sense of family' within the sixth form. Students make outstanding progress, during Year 13 in particular. High aspirations and motivation lead to outstanding achievement. By the end of Year 13, standards are exceptionally high. The curriculum has a wide range of options, successfully meeting the needs of all students. Enrichment options add breadth, for example enabling students to work as volunteers in the local community. Prefects are excellent role models for the rest of the school and some sixth formers are trained to act as peer mentors. Students receive excellent support and guidance, equipping them securely to go on to higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enable more students between the ages of 14 and 16 to reach the highest levels by ensuring a more consistent level of challenge in the teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are well above average and achievement is outstanding overall. Students make outstanding progress by the age of fourteen, because of good teaching and their own very positive attitudes towards learning and keenness to contribute to lessons. Progress and achievement are reflected in recent test results, with a very creditable proportion of students gaining the highest levels in the core subjects, particularly mathematics. Achievement of students between the ages of fourteen and sixteen is very good overall, and many achieve excellently. However, there are still pockets of underachievement, due principally to some inconsistencies in the overall quality of teaching, and there have been staffing difficulties in some subjects. Performance in GCSE examinations has improved in recent years. The school has targeted the highest GCSE grades as an area for improvement, since a small minority of students do not meet the appropriately challenging targets, as was evident in recent GCSE results. Particularly effective in helping many able students to achieve well is the school's strategy of early entry at GCSE and teaching more advanced courses in Year 11. There is no significant difference in the standards of students from ethnic minorities, whilst the minority of students with learning difficulties make excellent progress due to well-targeted support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students develop as confident, mature, articulate individuals. Excellent moral and social development is reflected in courteous behaviour, excellent working relationships and very good learning. Students have an excellent understanding of a range of cultures. They show outstanding awareness of healthy life styles and report favourably on the positive influence of assemblies and their lessons in reducing risk-taking behaviour such as smoking. The school maintains very high expectations of behaviour, and students report an effective response to

the few reported incidents of bullying. Very positive attitudes to learning reflect well above average attendance, and students enjoy the wide range of enrichment opportunities such as sports clubs. Students thrive on responsibility. They greatly appreciate the school's provision, although they would like more active involvement and excitement in some lessons. The school council is very influential in effecting change, for example in influencing the character of registration time and being involved in the appointment of teaching staff. Students in Year 9 and above take turns in refereeing games and coaching in a range of sports. High standards of basic skills such as ICT, along with excellent personal development, ensure that students are fully prepared for the next stage of work or education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement of good teaching and learning. A strong drive to succeed permeates students' approach to learning. All learners make at least good progress, regardless of their background. This results from good teaching, effective use of resources like ICT and the strong learning ethos in lessons. Characteristics of the good and better teaching are quick pace, high expectations and the active involvement of students. Progress is less rapid in a very small minority of lessons in which the teacher is too controlling, thus hampering students' development of independence in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is excellently matched to the varying needs of students and the expectations of parents. The recent introduction of Mandarin Chinese is typical of the school's willingness to continually review and innovate, thereby maximising learning opportunities. High attaining students are encouraged to achieve to the best of their ability by early entry into GCSE examinations, for example in mathematics, design technology and religious studies, and then studying Advanced Supplementary courses alongside sixth formers. Study support sessions and off-site provision in local colleges are very effective in helping other students to achieve very well. The range of curriculum extension and enrichment activities is outstanding and these have a high take-up. The school is developing work-related learning and enterprise activities well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students rightly believe that the school provides them with an outstanding level of personal guidance and support, which contributes to their security and good learning. The staff with a particular responsibility for learning needs give excellent support not only to students with identified learning difficulties but also any student who approaches them with a specific problem. Consequently, students with learning difficulties frequently make outstanding progress. Child protection procedures are secure and well understood. Support for students' academic progress

is well established, with considerable effort going into identifying weaknesses in areas of learning, and involving parents and students in setting targets for every student. This support is leading to an improvement in the quality of academic support. Therefore, the school is gradually but increasingly eroding inconsistencies in the way in which the resulting targets are translated into effective teaching strategies, enabling most students to achieve to the highest level in all subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher's clear vision and very able leadership have led to steadily improving achievement and have boosted the school's image within the local community. The senior leadership team fully supports the headteacher's drive for further success, a drive that is reflected in the well developed strategic planning. Thorough and accurate self-evaluation procedures have resulted in improved achievement in a number of subjects including design and technology and ICT. Subject management is at least good, although the senior leadership recognises some inconsistencies which result in not all students achieving their very best work in the classroom. Strategies to address this are having an increasingly successful impact on extending the range of teaching styles and providing more varied learning opportunities. Governors are strongly committed, have an effective committee structure and are well informed. Financial management and control are excellent.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

6 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Beths Grammar School, Bexley, DA5 1NE

Many thanks for the way in which you welcomed the inspection team into your school. We were very impressed by how courteous you were to us, and how you gave up your time to tell us so many things about the school. We also greatly enjoyed visiting some of your lessons.

We know that there are many excellent things about your outstanding school. You work very hard to get the excellent results which are a feature of the school. Most of the time your teachers give you challenging work which helps you to make excellent progress. We agree with you that you are extremely well cared for and supported, and that you not only achieve very good test and examination grades, but you also get lots of opportunities to take part in school clubs and visits outside lessons. You get on very well together, and we very much like the way in which you act responsibly when you get opportunities such as meeting in your year councils to discuss improvements, supporting other students, and even taking part in selecting staff. We also know that sometimes you would like to play a more active part in your lessons.

Much of your success is due to the excellent leadership of the school and the dedication of your teachers. We believe that you are right to be proud of your school. Whilst celebrating your many successes and excellent examination results, we have also asked the headteacher, staff and governors to provide even more opportunities in lessons for you to learn actively and be challenged in such a way that you can do even better.

Once again, thank you for such an interesting two days, and good luck with the rest of your time in school and in your future careers.

Yours sincerely

John Laver

Lead inspector