

# Beechen Cliff School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109332
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bath and North East Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	309964
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Middleton HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1040
6th form	240
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Charles Oldham
<b>Headteacher</b>	A Davies
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Alexandra Park Bath BA2 4RE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01225 480466
<b>Fax number</b>	01225 314025

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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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

Beechen Cliff School is a larger than average school for boys with a co-educational sixth form. The school serves a relatively affluent area and is oversubscribed. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. It has been a specialist technology college since 2004. The school has gained the Healthy Schools award.

The attainment of pupils on entry is above average. A small proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are below average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features, and is highly respected in the local community. Pupils start at Beechen Cliff School with high expectations and are not disappointed; they make good progress from the start, enjoy extensive curricular and extra-curricular provision and attain standards above national averages.

The headteacher provides an excellent role model through his courteous, confident but self-critical style that belies strong determination for all pupils to develop their full potential as learners and young people. It is underpinned by trust and respect for staff and pupils, and informed by accurate self-evaluation, which is exemplary in its involvement of the whole school community. An experienced and effective senior leadership team, an outstanding governing body and excellent partnerships with other schools are integral to the school's improvement strategies. Parents are well informed and overwhelmingly positive about the school, and support pupils actively.

Pupils show outstanding commitment to the school, respect for teachers and peers, and positive attitudes to learning. In the best lessons, teachers make the most of these qualities by using challenging questioning, preparing collaborative practical activities, and by setting high expectations for pupils' lesson preparation and follow up. However, whilst the quality of teaching is good overall, there is inconsistent use of assessment information or knowledge about individuals to develop pupils' initiative or deepen critical thinking in lessons. Nevertheless, the teamwork and leadership skills developed through their participation in extra-curricular activities enable pupils to be very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Pupils of all abilities make good progress in lessons but it is better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 to 11 overall. The GCSE results have remained at a similar level for the past three years and whilst they are better than previous years and well above national averages there are inconsistencies. The unvalidated sixth form results in 2007, which were well above average, show that students are able to sustain good progress when their course choices closely match their ability, aptitude and aspirations. The school shows good capacity to improve further and provides good value for money. Improvement in response to the last inspection and the quality of education and care in relation to resources are exemplary, but outcomes compared with pupils' starting points are not high enough to say that it is outstanding overall.

The school's plans to identify and address any underachievement are good but not all have yet had an impact. For example, a wide range of assessment data are now available to staff, pupils and their parents but the use of this data to provide different starting points for lessons, set and check targets or tackle issues emerging across subjects is not yet consistent. Several aspects of care, guidance and support are exemplary, including that provided for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Significant progress is evident in developing an outstanding curriculum and other activities that meet the needs, interests and aspirations of different pupils. This represents a fundamental improvement since the last inspection when the curriculum was judged unsatisfactory because it failed to meet statutory requirements or provide sufficient choice. Pupils' improved attendance and outstanding attitudes to learning indicate that recent changes are the right ones for Beechen Cliff School.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The sixth form is highly regarded in the local area and a good proportion of students join the school from other institutions. Whilst expectations are high, it is inclusive to students with wide ranging ability and almost all students who begin courses go on to complete them successfully. Students achieve well because they are supported effectively through good teaching and attention to individual needs and aspirations. The support and guidance that students receive are good. Students enjoy their courses and willingly engage in the many opportunities that contribute to school life and to the well-being of younger pupils. Effective use is made of partnership arrangements with a neighbouring school to provide a very wide range of academic courses.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Use knowledge about individual pupils to promote challenge, develop initiative and deepen pupils' critical thinking to tackle remaining inconsistencies in progress and achievement.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils enter the school with above average standards, make good progress overall and attain above average results in their GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics. Many also achieve success in sports and through different awards offered. The school sets challenging targets for all abilities and at all levels from the start, which most achieve, some attaining GCSEs earlier than usual. However, the pace of progress is more consistent in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 to 11. Whilst standards are above those achieved nationally, attainment in English and mathematics is not as high as expected for pupils in similar contexts, because the pace of progress is not sustained. Assessment is used regularly to monitor pupils' attainment and remove any barriers to learning. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enjoy their work and progress well across a range of subjects when matched to their capabilities.

Unvalidated data for 2007 indicate that the boys attained particularly well in relation to their other subjects in art and design, biology, combined science, English literature, German, history, home economics, music, physics, religious studies and statistics but less well in business studies. Specialist targets for overall school performance have been met, but pupils have not done as well in all aspects of technology, falling short of targets set for the specialist subjects.

In the sixth form in 2006 and 2007, students reached above average standards, with a high proportion reaching the highest grades. Achievement overall is good, but those students who join the sixth form with a lower level of attainment at GCSE make less progress overall. Some students achieve well above expectations and a very high proportion continues into higher education.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. In the main school and sixth form, pupils say they enjoy school, particularly lessons that provide excitement and challenge through active involvement in their own learning and that of their peers. However, the boys' contribution to departmental evaluations indicates that this is an area of variability. Nevertheless, the vast majority of pupils show very considerate behaviour towards each other and express respect for their teachers. The introduction of a wider range of courses and teaching styles, including use of information and communication technology (ICT) and 'assessment for learning', has coincided with improved attendance and punctuality.

Pupils feel safe, have an informed awareness of developing healthy lifestyles and, whilst many are tempted by the excellent quality of food available, participate in regular exercise as part of school life. The school has gained the Healthy Schools award and this achievement has involved pupils actively through the student council. In all years, pupils feel their voice is heard and that they influence decisions directly affecting the student body. A wide variety of fund raising activities for charities are organised and supported by the pupils. The moral and social maturity of pupils is a strength, developed through their participation in different group and team work activities, their approach to responsibility and willingness to learn from the role modelling of staff. Evidence of pupils' spiritual and cultural development is not extraordinary but remains good. Glowing reports from work-experience placements show that pupils develop the personal qualities and life skills that will enable them to contribute effectively to the community and the world of work.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils respond diligently to the good guidance given by teachers. In the better lessons, teachers provide challenging and relevant contexts, ensure all pupils are involved, and provide practical and challenging activities that move pupils' learning forward. For example, in an outstanding history lesson for Year 7 pupils, the teacher used technology effectively to generate enthusiasm and promoted independent thinking by encouraging the pupils to discuss and speculate about the best way to attack a castle. Where appropriate, teachers make good use of paired and group work, although in some lessons pupils rely too much on their teachers and opportunities to develop pupils' thinking skills are not always exploited.

Most lessons are structured carefully to maintain a good pace of learning. However, there remains wide variation in the way that teachers use assessment information to plan lessons and to ensure activities are adequately adapted for all pupils in the class, particularly for the most able. Not all marking guides pupils in how to improve but in some subjects, for example English, pupils develop the skills to use self- and peer-assessment effectively.

Across the school, teachers show good subject knowledge, know the pupils well as young people and are beginning to develop a shared understanding of their skills as learners. The individual

support given by teachers and teaching assistants for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provide a good example.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is outstanding; it offers a great deal of choice, is inclusive and responsive to the needs of pupils in the main school and in the sixth form and now contributes to developing the self-confidence of all abilities. Progress since the last inspection has been significant; the provision for ICT has improved; statutory requirements for religious education in Years 7 to 11 are now met; and citizenship now has a clear programme but continues to be taught alongside personal, social and health education and careers in limited time, albeit enhanced by specific events.

The curriculum is developing rapidly to provide excellent opportunities for different groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to progress at an appropriate pace, including fast tracking. Academic pathways are well established and vocational pathways include the very successful 'Skillforce' programme and one-year sixth form programme which are greatly valued by the students. The recent timetable review has facilitated further curriculum collaboration with the neighbouring girls' school, extending and developing choice in the sixth form.

The impact of specialist technology college status been seen recently through collaboration with science and with contributory primary schools. An example of the way that specialist status is having a positive impact across the school can be seen in initiatives that challenge pupils' problem-solving skills. However, because much innovation is recent it is too early to judge its full impact on raising achievement and standards.

An established strength of the school is the exemplary range of extra-curricular activities, including an extensive outdoor pursuits programme, all of which are inclusive, have a very high take up rate and are very clearly focused on personal development. The flexible curriculum available complements this to prepare pupils very well for their future economic well-being.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is good with some outstanding features. Child protection procedures are in place, and clearly outlined in the staff handbook, and staff have had comprehensive training. The quality of planning and care shown for the welfare of the pupils and students are exemplary. The tracking of pupils' academic progress is carefully detailed and the school is working hard to align assessment information with pastoral intervention and parental support. Whilst the complementary roles of pupils' different teachers, form tutors and middle leaders are clearly identified, the use of targets for example is not yet consistent. However, there are excellent strategies to support the more vulnerable and those who require additional support owing to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The vast majority of parents expressed appreciation for the care, guidance and support provided. Inspectors found that behaviour was managed effectively. Well-planned guidance and information for pupils in Years 9, 11 and in the sixth form provide sound support and advice

to promote appropriate choice of subjects and future careers. It is rare for pupils to change or give up on courses in the main school and sixth form.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The leadership and management of the school is good overall with some outstanding features. It is characterised by pride in the pupils' achievements and personal development matched by a strong commitment to continuous improvement in all areas. The headteacher was appointed to the school in 2005 following an inspection the previous year that judged the school sound. Sharply-focused action to address the weaknesses identified shows good capacity for further improvement. Governance, judged unsatisfactory previously, is now outstanding as a result of the extensive support and insightful challenge of the governing body. The distinctive qualities of the school that contribute to its ethos and popularity have been successfully maintained whilst skilfully modernising teaching and transforming the curriculum. However, it is too soon to see the impact of recent improvements in teaching. Assessment information is not yet being used consistently by teachers to help pupils to make better progress.

The strong role model provided by the headteacher is typified by his search for interesting humanities coursework to teach that would actively involve the pupils and promote their key skills. Many gain GCSE awards in Year 9 which reinforces his belief that whilst the boys do well many could do even better. His leadership is made effective by an experienced senior team, many of whom are developing new roles and responsibilities to reflect better the priorities of a school with new direction. Improved delegation is also evident in the significance of work led by middle managers and use of different stakeholders' views throughout the process of self-evaluation. Judicious use of available resources indicates good value for money. However, the impact of technology college status has been slow to accelerate improvement, particularly in some specialist subjects, English and mathematics.



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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	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?	2	2
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	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
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	2	
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

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Beechen Cliff School, Bath, BA2 4RE

Thank you for introducing us to your school during our recent inspection. We enjoyed the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in lessons and through discussions. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the school. We agree that Beechen Cliff School is a good school with many outstanding features.

- What we particularly liked about your school:
  - Your relationships with teachers and peers are mutually respectful and supportive.
  - You get high quality of care, guidance and support as you move through the school.
  - You attain above average standards of work, results and other achievements.
  - Your school is well led and managed by staff who provide good role models.
  - You have a wide range of courses and extra-curricular opportunities to choose from.
  - Your school listens to your views through the student council and other methods.
  - Your teachers have good subject knowledge and provide well structured lessons.
  - You value opportunities to learn through practical activities that get you involved.
  - Your parents, carers and the governors are supportive of you and your school.
  - You participate well in teamwork and opportunities to develop a healthy lifestyle.
- What we have asked your school to do now:
  - Ensure that you progress as well as you can across all subjects by making active approaches to learning more widespread and by challenging your depth of thinking.

Your headteacher has introduced many improvements since joining the school but is determined they are only the start of even greater enjoyment and higher achievement at Beechen Cliff School. We are confident that you will respond to this challenge and can show additional initiative in supporting the school's development. We wish you continued success and fulfilment in your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton Her Majesty's Inspector

30 November 2007

Dear Pupils and Students



**Inspection of Beechen Cliff School, Bath, BA2 4RE**

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What we particularly liked about your school:

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- You get high quality of care, guidance and support as you move through the school.
- You attain above average standards of work, results and other achievements.
- Your school is well led and managed by staff who provide good role models.
- You have a wide range of courses and extra-curricular opportunities to choose from.
- Your school listens to your views through the student council and other methods.
- Your teachers have good subject knowledge and provide well structured lessons.
- You value opportunities to learn through practical activities that get you involved.
- Your parents, carers and the governors are supportive of you and your school.
- You participate well in teamwork and opportunities to develop a healthy lifestyle.

What we have asked your school to do now:

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Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton  
Her Majesty's Inspector