

# Beechwood School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110076
<b>Local Authority</b>	Slough
<b>Inspection number</b>	310197
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christopher Russell 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>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	701
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Paul Rowley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Julia Shepard
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 September 2002
<b>School address</b>	Long Readings Lane Slough SL2 1QE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01753 520473
<b>Fax number</b>	01753 552985

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Beechwood School is a smaller than average sized comprehensive school serving parts of Slough. The school population is ethnically diverse: just over half of all students come from Black or other minority ethnic groups. Around a third of students have English as an additional language. The school takes in many students who arrive from overseas. An assessment centre has been set up in the school to analyse and identify the needs of any student arriving in Slough from abroad. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is almost three times the national average. Levels of social and economic deprivation in the local area are high. The school moved into new buildings in September 2007. A sixth form will open in the school in September 2008.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Beechwood School provides a good standard of education. The school has improved considerably over the past few years and is well placed to improve further. One parent summed it up: 'Well done to everyone for pulling Beechwood up from the depths to a really good school. Gold star!'

Leaders have worked hard over the past few years to improve the quality of teaching. They have faced severe problems in recruiting staff and, in many cases, have had to train teachers themselves. The focus has been on creating a strong, mutually supportive environment to retain staff and promote their development. This approach has worked. The school now has a highly committed and relatively stable workforce. Morale is high and staff are keen to continue their development. Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory overall, with some strengths. Almost all lessons are at least satisfactory, and a significant and increasing proportion is good or better. This better teaching is helping students to achieve much more. Students enjoy learning and have good attitudes. However, the proportion of good lessons is still relatively low and some lessons are rather pedestrian and lack sufficient challenge. The curriculum has developed over the past few years and is now good. A varied range of curriculum provision is in place to meet the diverse needs of students.

A key strength of the school's work is the outstanding care, guidance and support that it provides. There is a strong commitment to meeting the individual needs of every student, however challenging. A wide range of high quality support is in place for the relatively large number of students who are vulnerable or who face challenging personal circumstances. The school provides strong and highly individualised academic support for students, particularly at Key Stage 4. Staff offer an immense amount of additional support outside of lessons, through direct one-to-one help, study clubs and other activities. Students respond enthusiastically to these opportunities and they make a substantial contribution to their achievement.

This highly effective care, guidance and support ensures that, despite the challenges faced by many students, their personal development and well-being are good. Students feel very safe and happy in school. They are friendly, act sensibly and behave well. Relationships between staff and students are very positive. Students also make good academic progress during their time in school. They make most progress during Key Stage 4. Standards have risen considerably and, in the past five years, the proportion of students attaining five or more higher grades has increased from 4% to 53%. Students are becoming more confident and ambitious learners: a large number now plan to go to college or university.

Leadership and management are good. Over the past few years, the headteacher has provided determined and highly effective leadership, leading the school expertly through a period of considerable improvement. Her senior colleagues share her commitment and support her very well. It is notable that these improvements have been made alongside the heavy workload that comes from planning for new school buildings and the introduction of sixth form provision. The senior team has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. Aspects of the school's provision are monitored and evaluated closely. However, the results of monitoring are not always analysed in sufficient depth. As a result, opportunities to use them to inform and direct actions for further improvement are sometimes reduced. There is also scope for monitoring to focus more precisely on the impact of provision on students' learning and personal development.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good lessons.
- Develop the way in which the school monitors its work so that information from monitoring is analysed more fully and can direct further actions for improvement more sharply.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement has improved significantly in recent years and is now good. Students generally enter the school with standards that are below the national average; in some year groups, students enter with standards that are well below. Students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3. National test results have risen since the last inspection, although they are still low. Progress accelerates during Key Stage 4. Results have improved dramatically over the past few years. There were particular improvements in 2006 and 07. Although standards at the end of Key Stage 4 were below average, these students made good progress during their time in school given their capabilities and starting points.

There are no significant differences between the progress made by different groups of learners, including the various ethnic groups that make up the school population, and the large proportion of students with LDD.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students are very positive about school and particularly value their very good relationships with staff, who they recognise as working very hard on their behalf. Behaviour in lessons and around the site is good and the school is a calm and pleasant environment. Students feel safe in school, because they know that staff take their concerns seriously and will deal with any problems quickly and effectively. There is a very modest upward trend in the attendance rate but, despite the school's rigorous and persistent actions, it remains stubbornly below average.

Students show a good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and are enthusiastic about physical activity and sport. Their appreciation of a healthy diet is reflected in their obvious enjoyment of the healthy and appetising choices offered in the school's restaurant. Students enjoy opportunities to take on responsibility and they make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community. They develop satisfactory skills to support their future economic well-being. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are below average, although good opportunities for speaking and listening mean that students are able to express their ideas confidently in discussion. Students work co-operatively as part of a team and are supportive of each other. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with a significant and increasing proportion of good lessons. The classroom environment for learning is positive, secure and friendly. The vast majority of students enjoy lessons and show good attitudes to their work. Teachers have thorough subject knowledge. Teaching assistants provide effective support to students with individual needs.

Teachers use an appropriate range of learning resources and interactive whiteboards are used well to enhance teaching and learning. The learning objectives for the lesson are shared with the students and starter activities ensure a prompt and effective start to lessons. The best lessons are brisk and businesslike, with good questioning to extend students' thinking. However, in some lessons there is a slower pace of learning, with a lack of challenge, particularly for more able students. In many cases, insufficient use is made of the end of the lesson to check students' learning and reinforce key points.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that serves the needs of students well, particularly in Year 7 and at Key Stage 4. It is inclusive and helps to ensure that all students are able to make good progress and develop well. There is sound provision for English, mathematics and ICT; recent developments to support further improvements in literacy are beginning to pay dividends. There are good, varied opportunities for enrichment, including a wide range of after school activities. These opportunities are very popular with students.

A number of developments at Key Stage 3 are helping to ensure that the curriculum matches students' needs even more closely. These include the introduction of the 'Learners' Tool Box, designed to improve students' learning skills in the areas of thinking, literacy, working with others and self management. The school has also formed a separate group in Year 7 for a small number of students likely to find the move to secondary school difficult. This helps these students to make a successful transition into secondary education. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is well developed and includes an increasingly strong work-related dimension. It includes a range of pathways, allowing students to follow a programme that suits their needs and interests. The inclusion unit, 'Connect', provides good curriculum support for a number of students who find learning particularly challenging.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Staff have an excellent understanding of the personal and academic needs of each student. They also work very closely with a wide range of outside agencies. This ensures that they are able to provide comprehensive support to meet the diverse needs of all students, including students with LDD and those recently arrived in the country. The school has robust procedures to safeguard students.

Students' progress is tracked closely and this information is used very well to offer individual academic guidance. Students making insufficient progress are quickly identified and an impressive range of additional support is provided. Students understand their learning targets and what they need to do to reach them. The Elite Learners' Programme in Key Stage 3 supports the raising of attainment, as it encourages students to review their learning and take more responsibility for their own progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and her senior colleagues provide strong and very effective leadership, and much has been achieved since the last inspection. Good structures and processes ensure that

the school runs calmly and smoothly. Governors have a good understanding of the work of the school and provide effective support and challenge to the school's leadership. The school's links with parents, the local community and a range of other organisations are outstanding.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the quality of lessons and the judgements of inspectors closely matched those of the school. However, information about strengths and weaknesses in teaching is not yet analysed in sufficient detail. This limits the extent to which it can be used to inform strategies for the further development of teaching. The way in which middle leaders evaluate their work and plan for improvement is satisfactory and developing. Although there is good practice in some departments, some analyses lack precision and detail and do not link sufficiently closely to plans for improvement. Senior leaders recognise this and recently introduced a new system to improve this aspect of their work.

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## Annex A

## 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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

<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
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	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	2
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

29 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Beechwood School, Slough, SL2 1QE

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We judged the school to be good. Beechwood has clearly improved dramatically over the past few years. Examination results have gone up considerably and students now make good progress, particularly at Key Stage 4.

The way in which the school cares for you is outstanding. This helps you to develop well as young people. The atmosphere around the school is very pleasant and we found students to be friendly, sensible and well behaved. You told us how safe and happy you feel in school. You also told us how hard staff work to help and support you. The amount of extra support that staff offer to students outside of lessons is exceptional. We were also pleased to see that attendance is improving, although there is scope for further improvement.

Staff have also worked hard to improve lessons. We saw many good lessons. We could see that you respond positively and enjoy learning. We did, however, find that some lessons are better than others. We have asked the school to continue working on this area, so that more lessons are similar to the best. We think that this will help you to achieve even more.

The school's leaders monitor what goes on in school very closely. This helps them to continue improving the school. We have asked them to continue and develop this work further in the future. We felt that the school is well placed to continue improving over the coming years. The inspection team wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Chris Russell

Her Majesty's Inspector