

# The Beaconsfield School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110505
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310337
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 April –1 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Anne Feltham 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>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	806
6th form	114
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Amanda Slayton-Joslin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Alex Russell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 October 2004
<b>School address</b>	Wattleton Road Beaconsfield HP9 1SJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 673450
<b>Fax number</b>	01494 676404

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The Beaconsfield School is a smaller than average secondary school for students aged 11 to 18 years serving a relatively advantaged area. It is a non-selective school working in a context of selection. There are slightly more girls than boys. A small percentage of students are from minority ethnic groups; about 1 in 20 speak English as an additional language and very few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above that found nationally, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. The most commonly identified needs are specific learning; behavioural, emotional and social; and speech, language and communication. The number of students leaving and joining the school other than at the usual times is higher than average. The present headteacher has been in post since April 2005. The school has had specialist arts college status since September 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Beaconsfield School is a good school, which has developed apace in recent years. Students are immensely proud of their school. Older students speak enthusiastically about the ways in which it has improved: they enjoy new specialist working areas, a state-of-the-art learning resource centre and a recently-opened cafe; 'The Hub'. Parents and carers remark that their children often join the school lacking self-esteem, but rapidly develop confidence and a determination to succeed, as a result of the school's good care and guidance. One parent wrote, expressing the views of many, 'the new headteacher has completely transformed the school', another adding, 'it has gone from strength to strength'.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have established a vibrant, energetic and inclusive community. During the inspection the school suffered the tragic loss of a student. The way in which staff and students came together in the aftermath of this tragedy was testimony to the strengths of both its leadership and of relationships amongst all those making up the school community.

Senior leaders know their school very well. Recognising students' previous underachievement in some key areas, such as science and mathematics, the school has made up much ground in a relatively short period of time. As a result, students now achieve well as they progress through the school. The senior team has taken radical action to improve the quality of teaching and learning, focusing on the support and training of subject leaders and teachers experiencing difficulty in the classroom. Whilst this has had a significant impact, resulting in improvement in many subject areas, there remains some variation in the application of best practice. Most teachers teach and mark students' work well, but there is scope for further consistency. Improving the quality of provision in the sixth form is now a key priority for the school: there are already clear indications of rising achievement amongst current students and strong recruitment for next year. Developing partnerships, for example with a local grammar school, have the potential to raise achievement for sixth form students, both at this school and across the locality.

The school is becoming increasingly diverse, with growing numbers of students from different linguistic and cultural communities. They thrive in the school, enjoy good relationships with their peers and make good progress. Nevertheless, the school knows that it could do more to celebrate this diversity, building on the experiences of students from varied backgrounds to enrich the education of all.

The school has exploited its arts status very well, both to support school improvement and to strengthen local links, including feeder primary schools and community groups. Very strong leadership, which has the support of the wider school community, now means that there is good capacity for further improvement.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are currently satisfactory but improving rapidly. Students talk very positively about recent changes and describe the new head of sixth form as 'really on our wavelength'. Teaching is satisfactory and backed up by sound subject expertise and systems for regularly assessing and tracking students' progress. As a result, students' progress, given their starting points, is now satisfactory in most subjects. Standards,

however, are generally below those seen nationally. Students enjoy the sixth form; three quarters complete two-year courses and go on to higher education. The range of qualifications offered is expanding in order to provide a better match to students' abilities and aspirations. The developing partnership with the local grammar school is giving students a wider choice of A Level subjects. There are currently too few vocational subjects at advanced level and some A Level subject groups are too small to be viable. A small but increasing number of students join from other schools to take subjects introduced through the arts specialism. Relationships in the sixth form are excellent; the care, welfare and guidance provided for students are good, supporting their personal development and their spiritual, moral and social and cultural understanding. Students particularly appreciate the help in preparing them for further study and future careers. In turn, they play a significant part in the school and wider community and take their responsibility as role models very seriously. They play a major role, for example, in the all-age Effective Creative Learning (ECL) days and help younger peers with reading, sports, and clubs. They raise a lot of money for charities. The focus and pace of improvement brought about by recent changes in leadership and management demonstrate a good capacity for continuing improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

In order to make good even better, the school now needs to focus on:

- raising students' achievement in the sixth form
- ensuring consistently good practice - for example, in marking - across all subjects, with a particular emphasis on science
- ways to reflect the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the school population.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Achievement and standards overall have been improving during the last three years. When students enter the school in Year 7, their prior attainment is around, or slightly below, the national average but there are fewer higher attaining students than normally found. In 2007, standards in Year 9 were broadly in line with the national average although standards at higher levels in mathematics, and especially science, were below average. The school's analysis of students' current attainment and progress indicates improvement in 2008.

GCSE examination results in 2007 reflect satisfactory progress by students overall. Standards were broadly average. The numbers achieving 5 or more GCSEs were above the national average although the proportion achieving the higher grades, particularly including English and mathematics, was below that seen nationally. The achievement of boys was below the national average. Evidence from the inspection - including results from modular tests in science and mathematics - indicates significant improvements in examination results for 2008. This reflects current good progress in lessons, and since the start of the year, amongst all groups of students including boys. The school has introduced many changes aimed at improving progress and standards. Recently improved assessment, target-setting and monitoring procedures, together with a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning, are significant factors in this marked improvement in students' achievement.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students' personal development is good. They are extremely proud of their school and value the improvements which are being made to its facilities, such as the access to computers and the recently refurbished dining hall. They enjoy school thoroughly and develop good relationships with each other and with their teachers. On a day when the school community was struggling to come to terms with an unexpected tragedy, the real strength of these relationships was apparent in the supportive and calm atmosphere which prevailed. A small number of parents have expressed concerns about students' behaviour. However, inspectors judge this to be generally good, with students' mature attitudes making a strong contribution to the school's calm atmosphere. Students feel safe in school because they are very supportive of each other and are confident that any concerns will be dealt with effectively and promptly by staff. Although students understand and value each other's cultural differences, the school recognises that it could do more to build on students' own varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students make a good contribution to the school and wider communities and even the youngest students have a clear understanding of the notions of mutual respect and responsibility. The introduction of peer mentoring has offered further opportunities to help others and students relish these. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and physical activities are popular as both part of the school curriculum and as leisure pursuits. They have good understanding of a healthy diet and usually make wise choices from the appetising food available. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory, with average standards in the basic skills of numeracy and literacy. However, they work increasingly well in teams and groups in lessons and on creative and enterprise projects.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching and learning are good overall, with substantial recent improvement. Teachers have good subject expertise, develop supportive relationships with students and plan lessons well. In the many effective lessons, challenging and varied activities enable all learners to make good progress. Occasionally work is not as well matched to the needs of all groups of students, particularly higher attaining students. The school has an accurate understanding of its teaching strengths through detailed monitoring of classroom work and reviews of all subjects.

Students greatly enjoy learning and take considerable pride in their work. They work productively in groups, as in the popular ECL days where students collaborate in mixed-age teams to plan and produce events and products, developing good communication skills and increasing their motivation to study. Students say these days are 'brilliant'. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT), including interactive whiteboards, increasingly well to make activities stimulating; for example, in a Year 9 music lesson students listened to riffs and increased their understanding of notation. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teachers and learning support staff and so make good progress. Higher attaining students are increasingly being given more challenging tasks.

Teachers set clear targets for students and encourage them to assess their own progress. However, a few teachers do not yet use data on students sufficiently regularly to improve the quality of learning. There is half-termly monitoring of students' levels and grades and much constructive marking of written work. There are excellent examples of good practice to share, but marking does vary in quality across subjects. Support for new teachers is good. It has also helped raise quality in areas where teaching was weaker, for example in science. Teachers are very positive about their school and enjoy working there.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The school's curriculum is good and caters well for the needs of most students. Since September 2006 it has been significantly enriched through specialist arts status, which has led to some successful innovations such as the ECL days. In order to improve uptake in Years 10 and 11, and meet national benchmarks, a new languages curriculum has been introduced which offers increased choice in Year 9. Music provision, including staffing and equipment, has improved. In Years 10 and 11, the increasingly diverse range of academic and vocational courses in place since the last inspection, including regular ICT lessons, meet students' needs well. They choose one of three 'pathways' allowing some to take fewer GCSEs or study hairdressing or construction in a local college. All Year 10 students go on work placements for a week and careers guidance, which also involves the Connexions service, is very good. The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of clubs including sports, art, music, dramatic productions, and ICT. Provision for citizenship education is good, and the new full GCSE course in philosophy and ethics is proving successful.

Specialist arts college status has had a significantly positive impact on both students' motivation and achievement, building students' confidence and sense of responsibility very well. The curriculum has become more inclusive because wider links with the local community, feeder schools and other partner schools have allowed external students, including those from a local pupil referral unit, to access new arts-related courses such as music technology. The staffing, resources and potential of the arts-related subjects have been greatly improved through better funding. Arts status has also funded better management of students' behaviour, for example through the creation of the 'Lemon Wedge', a popular support centre for the school and local community.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support given to students is good. The school knows its students well and has their best interests at heart at all times. The quality of pastoral support is strong because, as well as offering 'in-house' support to students, the school works hard to maintain links with a very wide range of outside organisations which supplement this support. This enables the school to meet a wide range of students' needs very effectively. Some of the support offered is innovative. For example, a project to motivate disaffected students through involvement in a dance-based community project has had a positive effect on the students' attendance and attitude to work. The 'Lemon Wedge' project is very effective, particularly in meeting the needs of students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A wide range

of students, including some from local primary and special schools, have been involved in - and value highly - these activities. Students with a range of learning difficulties or disabilities, and those who are at an early stage of learning English, are given well-planned and monitored support and make good progress. There is less awareness of the needs of students who have advanced bilingual skills. The school's procedures for the safeguarding of pupils are appropriate.

The school's system for tracking students' progress is good and is used to identify students who are likely to underachieve and who therefore need additional help. Students are given regular individual feedback in reports and mentoring sessions on the progress they are making, on their targets and what they need to do to reach them. The regular individual meetings which students have with their tutors are highly valued.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher is described by his colleagues as 'visionary' and 'inspirational' and he has made a significant impact on the school since his appointment three years ago. He works closely with his highly committed and effective senior leadership team to provide excellent overall leadership to the school. Middle leaders are invited to become 'guest' members of the senior leadership team; this brings fresh ideas to the team and offers good development opportunities to staff who have shown management potential.

The school is implementing increasingly effective measures to raise students' achievement, which are this year showing a clear impact. Senior leaders have a good knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses, and self-evaluation is honest, accurate and realistic. Having identified some significant underachievement, particularly in areas such as science and mathematics, the senior team has galvanised colleagues, students and parents to make rapid and successful improvements in many key areas of teaching and learning. Strong classroom practitioners have coached those experiencing difficulty in their teaching and, as a result, the quality of teaching and learning has improved rapidly. Successful approaches to the recruitment and retention of teachers have resulted in an increasingly skilled and dynamic staff.

The headteacher and his senior team monitor classroom work closely and current good teaching and learning reflects the successful impact of this strategy. Subject leaders mostly demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and they track pupils' progress in their subjects to set clear targets for improvement. Although this practice is not yet fully consistent across all subjects, clear procedures are in place. Senior leadership intervention where weaker teaching is identified ensures that no pupil misses out. Teaching assistants are well deployed and have the potential to play a further developing role in raising achievement for the students in their care. Good line management arrangements have had a significant effect in raising the quality of subject leadership. The headteacher's outstanding leadership and the strong support he receives from the senior team are recognised by members of the wider school community. As a result, parents and carers are highly supportive of the school and have confidence in its ability to prepare students for success in their futures lives.



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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	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	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	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	2	
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?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
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	3
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	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	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

14 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Beaconsfield School, Beaconsfield, HP9 1SJ

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made. First, I should like to thank you for your warm welcome. We enjoyed listening to your views and watching you at work. We were so sorry to hear on Thursday morning of your tragic loss. We felt that the way you all responded to this news reflected the very caring and mature community to which you belong.

Your school is a good school, which has improved very rapidly in recent years. Your headteacher and his senior colleagues have worked very hard with your teachers to ensure that you get a good education. The school has identified areas such as science, where teaching and learning were not good enough, and has made the right changes. You are now beginning to make much more progress in these areas. We have asked your teachers to ensure that all subjects offer you learning experiences and appropriate feedback as good as the best teaching we saw in many classrooms.

You told us how proud you are of your school and particularly of the new facilities and the opportunities these offer. The school's arts specialist status is also a great strength, and many of you talked to us about how it has improved your learning.

We were impressed by your behaviour and by the mutual respect and support you show each other. Students from a range of cultural and language backgrounds get on very well together. We have suggested that the school build on this further, so that this rich diversity contributes to making you all more knowledgeable citizens in the future. The school's curriculum is changing fast, and many new opportunities are opening up for you. We have asked your school to ensure that opportunities in the sixth form are improved to match the rapid progress made in the main school.

We wish you all well as you continue to work hard and aim high!

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham

Her Majesty's Inspector