

Beechfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117094
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312486
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Glenn Gibsone
Headteacher	Miss Anne Heywood
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002
School address	Gammons Lane Watford Hertfordshire WD24 5TY
Telephone number	01923221269
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Beechfield School is below average in size and located in the Hertfordshire town of Watford. There are pockets of significant social disadvantage within the area. The children's starting points are below average in the Nursery and particularly so in early literacy and personal and social skills. Just over a quarter of pupils have learning difficulties, which is above average. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is also above average. Approximately three quarters of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Most of these pupils speak English as an additional language with approximately a fifth of pupils at the early stages of language acquisition in English. Higher percentages of pupils than are found nationally join or leave the school at various times of the school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory with some emerging strengths. This judgement broadly represents the view of the school through its own self-evaluation. Weaknesses in teaching and learning in the past have led to the underachievement of older pupils and a steady fall in standards to levels that are well below average in English, mathematics and science. There have been a number of staff changes and the school has recruited some high quality teachers. This is beginning to have a significant impact on pupils' progress and achievement is now good overall for the oldest pupils, where teaching is of the highest quality. However, variations in pupils' achievement still remain in other parts of the school. This is because, although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, variations in quality still remain. For instance, teaching for the oldest pupils is consistently outstanding and it is good for those in the Foundation Stage. Although teaching is satisfactory for all other pupils, some weaknesses exist and progress remains inconsistent across the school.

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. Relationships between pupils and adults and pupils themselves are positive in lessons and around the school. Many pupils state that they find learning fun. Attitudes towards learning are good and most pupils behave well. All pupils are developing a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. Pupils respond very well to high quality teaching and challenging work. This is particularly noticeable for the oldest pupils who undertake tasks with great enthusiasm and their behaviour is very good. However, when teaching is less demanding and the pace of learning is slow, pupils lose concentration and behaviour is not as good.

The quality of the curriculum is good overall and there is a good balance between developing the basic skills and taking part in more creative activities. The provision for those pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Beechfield is an inclusive school where the efforts of all are valued. Support staff make a significant contribution in lessons to work with pupils who need extra help. Good levels of care, guidance and support are provided for all pupils and those most vulnerable are well cared for. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and applied with rigour. Effective systems are in place to monitor the academic progress and personal development of pupils. Parents are very pleased about what the school provides for their child and comments such as, 'Children are happy and content and have many friends from many different cultures which I feel is advantageous for them' are representative of many parents' views.

Leadership and management of the school is satisfactory overall. Inspirational leadership by the head teacher is driving through a range of improvements and teamwork is now a good feature. All staff are making a contribution to school improvement and subject leaders are beginning to play an effective part in self-evaluation. Governance is satisfactory overall but not all governors are actively involved in monitoring the work of the school and a number of policies are out of date. However, taking all aspects into consideration and the level of improvement since the previous inspection, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The youngest pupils make a good start through the very effective teaching in the stimulating environment of the Foundation Stage. The Foundation Stage curriculum is exciting and the vibrant learning environment ensures a good balance between activities which the children can choose for themselves and those led by adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the school to match the best practice.
- Increase the involvement of governors in self evaluation and school improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils currently make satisfactory progress across the school from below average starting points in Year 1. The 2007 teacher assessments confirm pupils made good progress across Key Stage 1 to reach broadly average standards in reading, and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Standards in writing for these pupils are below average. Progress is more variable across Key Stage 2 and the latest validated data indicates that standards in English, mathematics and science fell to well below the national average in 2006. The unvalidated 2007 national test results show a small improvement against similar schools but standards remain too low.

Several factors have contributed previously to this trend of poor performance. They have included: an increasingly higher proportion of pupils joining or leaving at various times of the school year, of whom many speak little or no English; an above average number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; variations in year group size and weak teaching. However, teacher assessments for those pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 confirm that this trend is now being reversed. Inspection evidence clearly indicates that many Year 6 pupils are making much better progress and are now on track to attain the expected levels in English, mathematics and science in this year's national tests.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because work is carefully matched to individual need. The achievement of the growing number of pupils joining the school whose first language is not English is also good because of high quality provision.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good and reflected in their enjoyment, positive attitudes and behaviour. Attendance, although below average, is improving. Pupils enjoy school. One child said 'It's a really friendly place.' Pupils try hard and are keen to succeed. They are considerate and get on well with one another, regardless of race or gender. They feel that the school is a safe place where they can be certain to find someone to help them. Parents are very supportive of the way the school helps their children.

Pupils' moral and social development is good. In assemblies and lessons, pupils learn respect for themselves and others. Spiritual development is satisfactory, although opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and ideas are sometimes missed. Cultural development is good because there are many good opportunities for pupils to learn about each other's cultures. Pupils show a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and staying safe.

Pupils enjoy taking responsibility and are proud of their input into school life and through school council activities. They gain confidence and new skills through involvement in the good number of extra-curricular activities offered.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. No inadequate teaching was observed but significant variations exist. Teaching is best for the older pupils and those in the Foundation Stage with several examples of outstanding practice seen at the top of the school. It is satisfactory overall in all other classes with some good features in Key Stage 1. Planning is good in all classes. In the outstanding lessons, teachers effectively engage pupils with interesting and exciting resources, work is very challenging and assessment plays a fundamental part in the teaching process. In satisfactory lessons, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to use teaching aids effectively to illustrate key teaching points, the pace of lessons is too slow and pupils are less attentive. As a result, pupils' progress is more variable.

Marking and assessment are now good and provide pupils with good levels of feedback. Classroom assistants make a significant contribution to teaching and learning. They provide high quality support in all lessons for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a wide and varied curriculum. It is well planned to take into account the wide variety of needs and abilities of pupils, for example through guided reading and 'Extra Maths' sessions. Provision for English, mathematics and science is good. The programme for Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education is well thought out and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and safety. Specialist music provision and the teaching of French further enrich the curriculum.

Specialist provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good, as is the provision for pupils with English as an additional language. A good range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum, including residential trips and early morning and lunchtime clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff provide a good level of care, guidance and support for all pupils. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for pupils at the early stages of learning English, is well planned and effective. For instance, through class support or special nurture groups.

Clear behaviour procedures give pupils security and create a calm working atmosphere in which they can learn confidently. Procedures for child protection and safeguarding pupils are securely in place and meet requirements. Staff are quick to identify any pupils at risk and provide discreet but effective support. Health and safety procedures fully meet requirements.

The school has now developed very good procedures for tracking pupils' progress. The information is being used increasingly effectively to identify underachievement and to provide pupils with challenging targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, some significant strengths are beginning to emerge and are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement and the school demonstrates good capacity for further improvement. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher is a key feature and together with other leaders and managers within the school she is raising expectations and setting challenging targets for pupils to reach. Teamwork is developing well and all staff make an effective contribution to school improvement. Inclusion is a top priority and provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language and for those with learning difficulties is managed very well. Self-evaluation is being used satisfactorily to bring about school improvement. Monitoring of lessons by the headteacher is regular, thorough and effective. Combined with the increasing involvement of subject leaders it is clearly leading to improvements in teaching and pupil achievement. Governance is satisfactory overall. Governors are supportive of the school but not enough are actively involved in monitoring its work. All statutory policies are in place but several need updating.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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?	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?	2

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?	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

12 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beechfield School, Watford, WD24 5TY

I would like to thank you all on behalf of the inspection team for making us feel so welcome during our time with you. It was good to see you all working in class, playing happily in the playground and behaving well. Clearly, you all love being at school!

Miss Heywood is leading the school well and she has successfully motivated the staff to work as a team in order to make the school even better. However, there is still plenty to do. For some of you, progress in lessons is rapid because of some excellent teaching. This progress is not as quick for those of you in other classes and this is something that the teachers are going to work at to make sure that all of you succeed in your work. You can all help by working hard in lessons and coming to school each day.

All of the staff are very caring and the teachers mark your work in great detail to help you improve. Those of you who are learning English for the first time are doing well because staff encourage you to learn new words in lessons and provide many opportunities for you to speak in class.

The governors try to ensure that your headteacher and staff are provided with all the support they need to ensure the school runs smoothly. In the future, the governors are going to work even more closely with the staff to learn what might be needed to make the school is even better.

Wishing you all the very best for the future

Philip Mann

HMI