

# The Beacon School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	125306
<b>Local Authority</b>	Surrey
<b>Inspection number</b>	315230
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 December 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jennifer Smith 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>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1250
6th form	162
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr R Watts
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr J Darker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Picquets Way Banstead SM7 1AG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01737 359103
<b>Fax number</b>	01737 365200

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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

The Beacon School is a considerably larger than average comprehensive school. Although the school roll has fallen over the last few years, numbers in the sixth form have risen. It attracts students from seventy-two primary schools, across a wide geographical area; the school provides buses for students from outlying districts. There are usually slightly more boys than girls in most year groups. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals, those with English as an additional language and those with a statement of special educational need are all lower than the national average. However, over a quarter of students have some learning difficulties or disabilities, which is significantly above average. The school achieved specialist status for Media Arts in July 2006 and the National Healthy Schools award and Artsmark in the same year.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

In 2007, the overall standards achieved in national tests and GCSE at the end of Years 9 and Year 11 were well below the national average and varied considerably from subject to subject. Whilst standards overall have been below the national average since 2005, they fell significantly in 2007. The school was not expecting such a decline. Significant staff turbulence and a lack of appointment to key teaching posts during the last two years have hindered students' progress resulting in poor examination results and inadequate achievement from Years 7 to 11. Although important teaching posts were filled in September 2007, the staffing still remains fragile. The quality of teaching and learning this term is of a satisfactory standard overall. Whilst some teaching is of a high quality, reflecting excellent classroom management, clear learning objectives and engaging activities there is still too much teaching which is of a satisfactory and sometimes of an inadequate standard. Where teaching is good or better, students engage eagerly and participate well in their learning, enabling rapid progress to be seen. Satisfactory teaching is less well planned to make good use of assessment strategies. Too little attention has been paid to issues of literacy across the curriculum and this has adversely affected the standards attained in many subjects. Marking often fails to point out to students how they might go about improving their work.

Students' attitudes to learning are satisfactory, and where teaching is good they improve appreciably. Parents and students comment about low levels of distraction taking place in a minority of lessons and occasionally more severe disruption of learning by a small minority of students. A new system for dealing with this has been put in place since September 2007, and whilst this is not yet fully embedded, students and staff comment that there has been some improvement in behaviour this term. This was also borne out by the lessons observed by inspectors. Attendance is slowly improving but still remains below the national average and unauthorised absence is high. The school's data clearly reflects that where students' attendance is low it seriously affects their chances of success. The care, guidance and support provided for students is satisfactory overall because although students are helpfully set appropriate targets to work towards in the form of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, not all students fully understand the importance of these or, use them well enough. Homework is also not set with sufficient regularity by all teachers. Pastoral care is good and provides well targeted guidance in Years 9 and 11 and helpful support for students who have problems. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given appropriate help to make progress. However, students of average ability make inadequate progress. Effective use is made of external agencies to support students and, given the large number of primary schools from which students are drawn, they settle in very well at the start of Year 7.

The senior leadership team has until recently been too small to cope with the demands placed upon it. The senior staff restructuring, a little over a year ago, has put in place a more robust and appropriate structure, with closer line-management of subjects and aspects of the school, but this has yet to impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The inconsistency of approach in this line-management, is hindering change at a fast enough rate. Whilst the school records students' achievement and standards data in detail, the analysis is weak and its outcomes do

not feed sufficiently well into vigorous action on the part of managers at all levels, nor into the school improvement plan, which has also been weak. Whilst the school successfully won its bid for specialist status in media arts, the recent staffing difficulties have curtailed much of what was planned for in the specialist status bid. Overall direction and a speedy drive for improvement, at the most senior level, have been lacking. The improvements required in the last inspection have been partially addressed. A broader curriculum, providing vocational opportunities is now in place for both Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.

### **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

#### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form provision is satisfactory overall. It is a very inclusive Sixth Form, with an open access policy and there is a strong sense of community; students appreciate the supportive and friendly environment. A well-structured and wide curriculum allows students to choose from a good range of academic and vocational options. However, opportunities for learning experiences beyond examination subjects are not so well developed. The flexibility of the provision allows students to retake GCSEs and acquire vocational awards that will pave their way to A levels. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and behaviour is good. By the end of Year 13, overall standards are average but students' achievement varies considerably between subjects. Although students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, students' independent study skills are not so well developed. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and sometimes good, for example, in media studies and English. Students comment that teachers know their strengths and weaknesses well and provide good one-to-one support. Careers and university guidance are well planned and helpful, with many students going to their university of choice. Procedures for assessment are generally satisfactory. Targets are regularly set, but the monitoring of students' progress in relation to their targets is less effective.

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

- Rapidly improve the rate of progress made by students from Years 7 to 11 in a significant number of subjects. In particular, address issues of poor literacy skills in all subjects.
- Build capacity in the newly enlarged senior management team to ensure that robust measures are taken to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- Utilise student target-setting, marking and homework to help students understand more effectively how they can improve their work.
- Improve attendance to at least the national average.

### **Achievement and standards**

#### **Grade: 4**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average, although the school has a small proportion of high achievers. By the end of Year 9, standards reached in national tests are below average. In 2007, GCSE results at the end of Year 11 were significantly below average in a number of subjects including business studies, combined science (single award), design technology, mathematics, physical education, drama and information and communication technology (ICT). A significant number of students who studied history achieved exceptionally high results. Creditable results were also gained in statistics. Standards had been rising, albeit slowly, until the decline in 2007 when 42% gained 5 or more subjects at grades A\*-C, whilst 38.5% achieved 5 or more A\*-C including English and mathematics. However, a small proportion

of students did exceptionally well, achieving 6 or more GCSEs at the highest grades of A and A\*. Standards and progress vary considerably across subjects. The high level of achievement in some subjects is due to better quality teaching where planning underpins meaningful learning. The small number of students whose first language is not English make better progress than other groups. Most students have made insufficient progress between Year 7 and 11 and their achievement overall is inadequate, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Those who do least well are the average-attaining students. The main causes of this underachievement are, the instability of staffing linked particularly to poorer quality teaching in previous years, students' poor attendance, and the lack of urgent remedial action on the part of senior staff where students fell behind.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Although most students behave sensibly in lessons and around the school, a small number choose to distract others or be disruptive. The school has very recently worked with students to draw up a new code of behaviour in order to minimise the inappropriate behaviour and limit its impact on lessons. Most teachers set and maintain clear expectations for behaviour. Students and their parents expressed their frustration at the loss of valuable teaching time to deal with inappropriate behaviour. However, most agree that there has been some improvement this term and there has been a reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions this year. While attendance has improved overall, this was from a particularly low point and it remains below the national average. The school has introduced some measures to reduce absence and has set ambitious targets, which it has yet to reach. A minority of students do not enjoy their lessons and are not motivated to come to school. It is clear that poor attendance is having a negative impact and is restricting students' progress because there are significant gaps in their learning.

Although students understand how to be healthy and stay safe they do not always choose to lead healthy lifestyles. Many students, including those in the Sixth Form, are willing to accept extra responsibilities, such as being part of the dynamic student council, acting as classroom assistants, or helping to coach or mentor younger students. It is clear from talking to these impressive young people that they take their responsibilities very seriously and care passionately about their school community. They willingly involve themselves in community activities and raise funds for a wide range of charitable causes. The school is working hard to prepare students for adult life through its personal, social, health and citizenship education programme and its developing range of vocational courses. However, as some students lack properly developed literacy and numeracy skills they are not adequately prepared for the future.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching and learning are presently satisfactory in both the main school and in the Sixth Form. However, inadequacies in the quality of teaching in the recent past hindered students' progress

and led to poor examination results. There is a small core of improved teaching brought about by more stable staffing this term. Parents and students, however, have expressed some concerns that frequent staff changes and the high number of temporary and supply teachers in the previous school year have led to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, borne out by inspection evidence. The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and plan activities that are well-matched to the students' interests and abilities and set clear expectations. For example, students made good progress in a most enjoyable Year 11 drama lesson, when the enthusiastic teacher, involved them in their learning through extensive class discussion and probing questioning, followed by stimulating and challenging tasks. There are, however, variations in the quality of teaching and learning across departments. For example, where significant lesson time is spent on whole-class teaching at the expense of more active tasks, students' opportunities to explore ideas to the full are limited. In a minority of lessons low expectations and a lack of variety leads to passiveness or low-level disengagement, and as a result students' progress is limited. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English are well supported to make satisfactory progress.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of learners. In Year 7 an alternative programme, designed to raise self-esteem and to develop learning and listening skills complements the traditional curriculum in Key Stage 3. The increased flexibility of the Key Stage 4 curriculum enables students to choose courses, which are well suited to their needs, interests and future aspirations. The option choices in Years 10 and 11 provide students with a wide range of academic and vocational courses and allow a combination of both pathways. Option choices include work-related courses, provided either at school or at a local college. The whole-school development of literacy has not yet been introduced across departments, although early discussions have now taken place. A fast-track scheme allows more able students to complete their GCSE examinations in technology and statistics at the end of Year 10, opening up further and more challenging opportunities for them. The curriculum caters well for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The 'Accelerated Reading Scheme' is beginning to have an impact on students' reading skills. Careers guidance, work-experience and enterprise learning, supported by links with local business, help students to prepare adequately for the world of work. The specialist status in media arts provides good opportunities for extra-curricular activities such as theatre, film and musical productions. The 'late bus' now enables a greater number of students to participate in after school activities. The sixth form curriculum is good in its breadth and flexibility, successfully meeting the needs of students of all interests and abilities.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Robust child protection and anti-bullying procedures are in place and are regularly reviewed. Arrangements for addressing health and safety matters are well established. Good pastoral systems and procedures support students well and tutors have a thorough knowledge of their students. An effective central electronic recording system enables data on student behaviour to be gathered rapidly and early intervention triggered. This has contributed to reducing

exclusions and incidences of poor behaviour in lessons recently. A team of full-time non-teaching student managers provide a wide range of services to support students and link effectively with parents and with class tutors. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and helped effectively by teaching assistants in lessons and through withdrawal groups to support both academic and emotional development. Effective guidance is provided for students at key points in their school life particularly in Years 9 and 11. Good links with external agencies help the school to provide helpful support to vulnerable students and students at risk. In addition, the school has specialist staff of its own, for example, a school counsellor. Good liaison with feeder primary schools and well-planned induction procedures smooth the way for all students joining the school in Year 7, including those experiencing learning and behavioural difficulties. Students are given numerical targets to reach but do not have sufficient academic guidance to help them reach these. Similarly, quality of marking of students' work is not always consistent with some teachers providing too little constructive advice on students' work about how they might improve their work. The further development of target-setting and assessment to raise students' achievement and aspirations are rightly seen by the school as priorities for the present academic year.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 4**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management are inadequate overall. A strong drive to raise standards and clear direction has been lacking at the most senior level. The senior leadership team took the correct decision recently to seek additional outside help to gain a clear understanding about where the school stands. An insufficient spotlight has been given to monitoring students' progress, which also lacked sharply focused follow-up action. The recent senior leadership team restructuring and appointment of four assistant headteachers has the potential to shape future developments, including more systematic line-management, and a closer system of monitoring to gain a more accurate picture of teachers' strengths and weaknesses and also to develop the target-setting processes. Staff performance management has not been central to driving improvements in students' achievement and standards. After a period of significant staff turbulence, affecting the achievement and standards of students, management posts have now been filled, including at crucial middle-manager level. Recently, more effective subject leadership has been established where vacancies existed, but there has been insufficient time for this to make a real impact on achievement and standards to date. However, there are still concerns about the stability of the most senior positions in the school. Subject leaders are provided with sufficient data on which to prepare detailed analyses and action plans but there is not a consistent approach to action-planning across the school. A clear line-of-sight between the main school action plan and departmental plans is not in place. The school is data rich but this information is not sufficiently linked to the target-setting process. Consequently challenging targets have not been achieved. Governors have very recently been more active in challenging the school in aspects of under-performance.



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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?	4	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	4	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	3

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	2
The attendance of learners	4	3
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	3

### The quality of provision

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

<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>	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Beacon School, Banstead, SM7 1AG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. It is clear that you value the support and guidance provided by your teachers; we agree with you that this is a strength of your school. You contribute a great deal to the whole school community through your active participation in the student council and in raising money for various charities. Many of you are proud of your school.

We were pleased to learn that you also helped to draw up the new behaviour code and that this has led to improved behaviour this term. Indeed, we were pleased to see how well the majority of you behaved and that you had a positive attitude in the lessons we visited. Inspectors noted that exclusions have gone down this year; this is particularly encouraging. Your attendance has also improved, but it still remains lower than we expect of students in secondary school. We hope that you will all take personal responsibility to attend school every day and will only be absent when you have a genuine reason.

Your teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and you reported that you enjoyed lessons where you are actively involved in the learning rather than just listening. We know that over the past year or so you have had too many changes of teachers and this, combined with poor behaviour of a minority of students in some lessons, means that you have made less progress than we feel you should have made. This now requires you to work very hard with your teachers in order to achieve the results you should by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Because of this, we have placed your school in 'Special Measures', which means that there is likely to be a visit by inspectors each term to check on the progress made.

We have asked your headteacher and the staff to improve things by:

- ensuring you make rapid progress in your studies and are given help with literacy in all subjects
- helping you improve your work by using target-setting, homework and marking more effectively
- helping you to improve your attendance
- and by asking the senior staff to ensure that all teaching is good.

We wish you well in your future studies.

Jennifer Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector