

Beacon Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131544
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	315828
Inspection dates	7–8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	163
6th form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Andrew Graydon
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Jones
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Rising Sun Cottages High Farm Wallsend Tyne & Wear NE28 9JW
Telephone number	0191 6433000
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many pupils also display autistic spectrum disorders. The school opened two years ago following the amalgamation of two smaller schools. It moved into new, purpose built premises in January 2008. Pupils come from a wide range of family backgrounds, broadly representative of the local population. Nearly all are White British. Sixth form students spend most of their time on a site attached to a sixth form college about five miles distant from the school. Foundation Stage children are joined by some from Year 1 to form the Early Years department.

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 very bright prospects. It has many outstanding features and is particularly well led, managed and governed. These combine to give the school an excellent capacity to improve. The outstanding headteacher, with exceptionally good support from her deputies has very effectively led the transformation of the school over the past two years. With very few exceptions, parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and feel valued partners in their children's education. They voice the well justified opinion that their children are happy, thriving and safe whilst at school. Every pupil the inspector talked with expressed the same view. The school has an excellent reputation within the local authority and has exceptionally good working relationships with the many other professionals, support agencies and schools whose work contributes to the enrichment of pupils' lives.

The nature of pupils' difficulties means they cannot reach the standards expected of mainstream pupils. Nevertheless, as a result of good teaching, they achieve well. This is particularly so in English and personal, health and social education but less so in mathematics. Staff forge excellent relationships with pupils and manage any difficult behaviour extremely well, especially in the classes for pupils with autism. As a result, harmony abounds. This contributes enormously to pupils' obvious enjoyment of work and play and their excellent behaviour. Occasionally, small amounts of valuable learning time are lost, either through the pace of lessons flagging, or because tasks do not completely fill the time available.

Pupils attend whenever they can. Although the school does everything it can to promote healthy lifestyles, the frail health of an increasing number of pupils accounts for nearly all absence. Pupils are keen to come to school because the outstanding curriculum ensures that each day is filled with purposeful, well planned activities that interest them. A rich range of high quality opportunities frequently extends learning and enjoyment beyond the confines of the classroom and pupils have many opportunities to mix with pupils, in and from, mainstream schools. These contribute enormously to their personal development. Pupils' social development is excellent. It is greatly enhanced by the school's great success in helping them to communicate by any means possible and by the fact that pupils are exceptionally trusting, friendly and honest. These factors greatly enhance pupils' prospects of leading fulfilled lives when the time comes for them to leave school and make them valued members of the community, to which they contribute so much.

Excellent attention is paid to ensuring that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. Pupils learn valuable things about the importance of keeping away from dangerous or unpleasant situations and not attracting unwelcome attention. These are invaluable in helping them to live safer, more independent lives as they grow up. The school recognises that in order to improve the educational guidance it provides for pupils it needs to refine its assessment procedures. It is currently focussing on improving the identification and monitoring of the tiniest steps by which those with the greatest difficulties make progress.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is popular, effective and exceptionally well led and managed. All Beacon Hill pupils choose to stay at school for the extra three years that are made available to them. Students continue to make good academic progress and go from outstanding into overdrive

in their personal development as they grow rapidly in maturity and independence. Teaching is good and often outstanding, with staff showing an excellent awareness of the widely varying individual needs of students. Students are encouraged to commit themselves to courses which lead to them gaining qualifications and nearly all pupils leave with a range of qualifications which accurately reflect the progress they have made. The sixth form has a clear identity, marked by the focus of the curriculum moving from classroom based learning to helping students to become more independent, through learning how to look after themselves and the development of skills that will help make them valued members of the community. Many students are very proud of their ability to use public transport, valuing the independence and freedom it gives them.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children nearly always enter the Early Years department at the very earliest stages of learning and personal development. Nearly all have profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities and an increasing number have life threatening medical conditions. All the children are exceptionally well cared for by dedicated and highly experienced staff. Good teaching helps them to make good progress. This is in tiny, often barely perceptible, steps which staff are particularly adept at spotting and are thus able to reassure parents that their children are learning and developing, even though this progress cannot usually be measured in conventional terms. The main drive of the Early Years department is to identify ways in which children can be helped to communicate. In this it is very effective, paving the way for successful transfer to the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Speed up progress in mathematics.
- Ensure that teaching and learning continue at a good pace throughout lessons.
- Refine assessment procedures.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils achieve well. The nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities means they cannot attain the standards expected of pupils in mainstream schools. Nearly all pupils arrive at school at a very early stage of learning and development. A few barely move beyond this point but can still be seen to be making good progress in infinitely small steps. The good progress of more able pupils enables them to leave school with good, nationally recognised qualifications in courses designed to reflect the achievement of pupils unable to access GCSE. Progress is measured against personal targets agreed with parents and, wherever possible, the pupils themselves. Pupils meet with a good degree of success in meeting these targets. Progress is better in English than in mathematics. Whilst teachers are adept at spotting every opportunity to promote literacy and communication skills they have been less successful in recognising the multitude of ways in which pupils can acquire numeracy skills. Effective work to address this has been done over the past year and it is beginning to pay dividends. There is no marked difference in the achievement of any particular group of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their well-being are outstanding. Pupils are welcoming, polite and friendly and they socialise exceptionally well with other pupils, staff and visitors. They are keen to help one another whenever possible and show great consideration for others younger, or with greater difficulties, than themselves. These factors, along with their excellent behaviour demonstrate their awareness of the importance of keeping safe and contribute significantly to making the school a very happy community. This sense of community is greatly enhanced by pupils taking on simple responsibilities around school and their extensive contribution to the broader community through fund raising and hospitality events. Pupils attend whenever they can, though the attendance of a few is limited by medical factors. Everything possible is done to encourage pupils to lead healthy lives and nearly all of them enjoy exercising to their limits and eating and drinking sensibly. The progress pupils make throughout the school, especially in their personal development, ensures that pupils are exceptionally well placed to make the best of their lives on leaving school. Making a huge contribution to these prospects is the excellent work that secondary age students do in business and enterprise activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The enhanced skills of a dedicated staff ensure that individual needs are very well met. This is very important as each class contains an extremely wide ability range. No opportunity is missed to help pupils to communicate by whatever means possible and there is skilled use of signs, symbols and prompts. Tasks challenge and interest pupils, with the result that they are very keen to try their hardest to achieve success and to behave extremely well. Perceptive monitoring of lessons by managers has identified that the pace of teaching and learning slips occasionally and that a few teachers miss opportunities to assess pupils' progress as they learn. Mathematics teaching is every bit as good as for any other subject but until recently, teachers have tended to miss opportunities to promote numeracy skills in other situations. Large staff teams are managed extremely well by teachers with the result that assistance quickly arrives whenever pupils need it, either to help them learn or to control their impulses.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding curriculum meets all requirements and achieves a fine balance between the subjects of the National Curriculum and the promotion of pupils' personal development. In this way it is particularly well suited to the needs of individuals. An excellent range of activities, including an extensive programme of visits and visitors, adds interest and enjoyment to learning. Residential experiences for many of the older pupils contribute enormously to helping foster

greater independence and responsibility. Effective steps have been taken to strengthen the curriculum in relation to promoting numeracy skills across all subjects and last term saw an increase in the numbers of individual numeracy targets being met.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils are offered excellent personal care, with stringent procedures to ensure their safety and dignity. Excellent relationships with parents and with external services and professionals, many of them now housed on site, contribute enormously to the care and support of pupils. Pupils are offered good support to help them learn. It is good rather than outstanding because assessment procedures are not quite sufficiently honed to fully identify the progress being made by pupils, especially those with the greatest degree of learning difficulty and/or disability. Pupils with autism are given excellent support to help them control their emotions and actions. Older pupils are given extensive guidance on the range of opportunities open to them when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. Over a short period of time, two very different schools have been combined into one which has an exceptionally clear identity and a crystal clear vision for future improvement. The excellent headteacher has ensured that leadership and management duties are extensively and effectively shared, with a particularly strong contribution from two deputy headteachers. The effectiveness of leadership and management has most recently been demonstrated in the successful move to the current site, which proceeded smoothly and with as little as possible disruption to pupils, who have very quickly settled in to their new surroundings and routines. Perceptive, accurate monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work allows constant fine tuning of practice, so as to avoid any need for sudden or radical changes. Governors know the school inside out because they visit regularly and play an important role in monitoring and evaluation. They are very proud to be associated with the school and are contributing particularly well to further improvement.

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	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	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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

9 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Hill School, North Tyneside, NE28 9JW

I have just got home following a wonderful two days in your new school. You looked after me really well and I left with many happy memories. I think you are very lucky to be able to go to such a good school. Three cheers for your outstanding headteacher!

One or two of you wanted to know why I came, when all I did was walk around, talk and look at what you were doing. It is called inspection.

I was glad to see you working hard, behaving well and making good progress in lessons. You seem to do a bit better in English than mathematics so I have asked staff to keep trying to sort this one out.

I did not see any naughtiness at all and I am sure that this is just one of the reasons the school is such a happy, safe and enjoyable place. You all seem to get on really well with each other and with staff.

I saw some really good teaching but I am told that, every so often, bits of lessons get bogged down and you start to lose interest. I hope that teachers are going to look at this to see what can be done.

It is always good to see schools such as yours checking how well you are getting on. It is difficult at times, because some of the important things you achieve are very hard to measure. I am hoping that staff are going to keep trying to find new ways to let you know how well you are making progress.

That is it for now. Good luck for the future

All the best

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector