

Beaumont School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117514
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326632
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1180
Sixth form	288
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Ingermells
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Hitch
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Oakwood Drive St. Albans Hertfordshire AL4 0XB
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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 school serves an area of St Albans that has relatively low levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The school is very popular, being highly oversubscribed. It was awarded specialist language college status in 2003 and an additional specialism for mathematics and computing was awarded in 2008.

The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who have a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average, while the proportion who are from minority ethnic groups reflects the national picture.

The school is part of a sixth form consortium with Sandringham and Verulam, two other local schools. Separate inspection teams coordinated by HMI inspected all three schools and their respective sixth forms simultaneously.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Beaumont School is a good school. A number of aspects of its work are outstanding. The capacity for further improvement is good and the great majority of parents speak highly of the school.

Students make good progress in their work and by the end of Year 11 reach exceptionally high standards. This is because teaching is of good quality, and there is an unusually high proportion that is outstanding. Progress in science in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics in Years 10 and 11 is, however, only satisfactory. The school's leaders, who monitor the school's effectiveness well, have taken steps to bring about improvement in these subjects. This is having a clear effect in mathematics and there is also evidence of some improvement in science. Leadership and management of the school are good. The senior leaders' evaluation of the school is perceptive. The quality of improvement planning at whole school level is good, but is not matched by that of all subject departments. Some of the plans lack detail and clear strategies for monitoring the effectiveness of the actions taken. The extent of the implementation of some of the school's policies varies. In some subject departments, for example, students' awareness of their targets is inconsistent.

Students' personal development is outstanding. The school's good approaches to care, guidance and support play an important part in this. Students are exceptionally well served by the curriculum. It provides extensive challenges for the more able and caters well for those who are less academic. Students' enjoyment of school is strong and is enhanced by the many visits the school organises and by the wide range of extra-curricular activities. These are well attended. Students' understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles is good. This understanding is developed partly through a wide range of outside speakers, including those with personal experience of life-threatening but preventable illnesses. This approach is effective in raising students' awareness of ways in which they can remain healthy. Students say they feel safe in school, and they report that although there are some racist comments and instances of bullying, these are dealt with. They make extensive contributions to the community, both that of the school and the wider community. The high personal and academic standards students reach, their ability to work both independently as well as in groups and the school's admirable emphasis on preparation for working life mean that they are outstandingly well prepared for their future economic well-being.

The school's specialist status in languages has a strong impact on the local community. Beaumont School has taken the lead in establishing support for modern foreign language development in local primary schools and is also involved in this initiative at county level. Many adults from the local community have taken the opportunity of studying a foreign language at the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are outstanding. High numbers of Beaumont School's students continue their education in the sixth form, mainly following A-level courses. The proportion of Year 12 students who stay on into Year 13 is exceptionally high. Large numbers are successful at gaining entry to universities. Students following courses in modern foreign languages benefit greatly from specialised facilities. An excellent curriculum, through the sixth form consortium, provides students with a wide range of courses. This includes an

extensive academic curriculum, including the international baccalaureate, and also courses tailored to particular careers, according to demand. Courses are closely matched to students' prior attainment and their aspirations.

The standards achieved by students are outstanding, though their standards on entry to the sixth form are in line with national averages. This demonstrates exceptional progress. It is a result of the outstanding quality of teaching, and of the care, guidance and support students receive and their excellent independent study skills. Students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. They enjoy sixth form life and their behaviour and attitudes are exemplary. Many of them provide help and advice to younger students and some act as ambassadors for a range of subjects in the lower school. Some work with a local school for hearing impaired children.

The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. Sixth form students say, 'This school is brilliant.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of middle leaders so that there is greater consistency in the quality of planning and in their monitoring of the implementation of school policies.
- Increase the rate of progress that students make in science in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics at GCSE.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school in Year 7 having reached standards that are above, or well above, the national average. By the end of Year 11, they reach exceptional standards. In 2008, more than three quarters of students attained five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with the national average of about half. This represents good progress. However, in the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 9, students showed only satisfactory progress in science. The unconfirmed results from 2008, along with the school's own monitoring data, show that the picture is beginning to improve. In mathematics, the 2008 GCSE results show that students in Years 10 and 11 made satisfactory progress. Again, evidence from the school's own data, confirmed by observations during the inspection, clearly suggests that progress is improving. In modern foreign languages some students pass their GCSE examinations in Year 9, demonstrating exceptional progress.

Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. There is no significant difference in the performance of different ethnic groups or between boys and girls.

All the specialist school targets have been met. There has been a steady improvement in standards in modern foreign languages, and over one third of students study two languages at GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding features of the school. Their very good enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance and in the high take up of a wide range of school trips and activities; in the words of one Year 7 student, 'There really are loads!' Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good: parents, visitors and outside agencies such as work experience providers, praise

the social skills of Beaumont's 'well-rounded', courteous students. They respect each other and do not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Few students are excluded from school. Opportunities for the students to take responsibility and to learn adult workplace skills are outstanding throughout the school. Such initiatives are creating qualities of reliability, flexibility and leadership that contribute to the students' excellent sense of well-being. The students' contribution to the local community is excellent: they work with young and old. Some Year 8 students, for example, help with literacy in partner primary schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is an unusually high proportion of good or outstanding teaching, but there is also a small proportion that is inadequate. In the best lessons, teachers' excellent subject knowledge and detailed planning ensure that students' prior learning and attainment are taken into account well. A wide variety of activities helps develop students' learning. Independent and collaborative working is very effective and students enjoy the challenges presented to them. In one outstanding lesson, high expectations and the focus upon assessment guidelines meant students had a very clear understanding of what they needed to do to improve their work. Complex pieces of evidence were analysed with maturity and insight. In a few lessons, however, weaker planning and lower expectations result in slower progress. In these cases students are not fully engaged, behaviour sometimes deteriorates and learning becomes inadequate.

Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities receive good care and support. The quality of marking and feedback to students on their progress is variable, some is of very high quality but some offers too little advice on how students could improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum provides exceptionally well for the range of abilities within the school. For example, for those students who need more support to develop their literacy, additional lessons are available. A good proportion of students are able to take their GCSE in a modern foreign language two years early. There is an extensive range of courses for those in Years 10 and 11. These include a course in information and communication technology (ICT) for all, as well as vocational courses and the opportunity to study at a local college. Extra-curricular activities cover a wide range of sports and academic subjects, including languages such as Chinese, Russian, Urdu and Japanese. There is a very good number of visits, many of which are to foreign countries. The school's links with schools overseas enrich students' understanding of the diversity of the world's cultures. The curriculum contributes strongly to students' enjoyment of school and to their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for students is good. Child protection procedures as well as those for health and safety are in place. However, in the science department, compliance with safety procedures is inconsistent. The school has an excellent reputation in the community for its work with vulnerable students who have a variety of learning and physical needs: liaison with parents and thoughtful advance planning have helped such students to progress to

university. The quality of planning also motivates these students to take part in trips, even though their disabilities might otherwise deter their involvement. The school liaises with local primary schools to ensure that Year 7 students settle comfortably into their new environment. There is excellent advice about options for Year 10 and Year 12 in one to one interviews. Students are generally aware of their targets for improvement, although some inconsistencies exist between subjects. The school is developing clearer systems to enable early intervention and prevention of underachievement. Staff recognise the existence of some occasional bullying through the medium of modern technologies, such as mobile telephones and computers, and are alert to this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leaders' analysis of the school's strengths, as well as its areas for development, is accurate and rigorous. Judgements about the quality of teaching are mostly accurate, although they do not take sufficient account of the extent of learning in lessons. The continued development of the quality of teaching is a clear commitment. Some specialist school funding has been used to appoint three Advanced Skills Teachers who have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching across the school.

The school improvement plan is well based upon the evaluations of the school's performance. It is detailed and specific. Leaders, including those of subject departments, are usually held to account effectively by frequent meetings with their line manager. The meetings include close scrutiny of the progress being made in further raising standards. However, some departmental plans for improvement lack the detail necessary for leaders to judge whether the progress made is sufficient.

Governors have a clear understanding of their role and ensure that they monitor the progress the school is making. They pay proper attention to the progress, attendance and behaviour of the different groups of students. Governors provide a good degree of support and challenge.

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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	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	1
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	1
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	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Beaumont School, St Albans, AL4 0XB

Thank you for helping us when we inspected your school recently. We spoke to a good number of you about your work, and were grateful to those of you who helped to prevent us getting lost!

We found that Beaumont School is a good school, and the sixth form is outstanding. You make good progress in your learning because of the good teaching you receive and the outstanding curriculum. You are well cared for and given good support and guidance. We were very impressed by your personal development and well-being, which are outstanding. The way you help others in your school and in the wider community is very impressive, as is the way in which you prepare for your future. Your school helps you a lot in this, not only through helping you to reach exceptional standards in your learning, but also through helping you to develop the skills of independent learning. Some of the wide range of extra-curricular activities, together with the school's many visits, and the links with schools overseas gives you a strong understanding of different cultures. The good and outstanding features of your school come about because your school is well led.

We have asked your school to look at two areas to improve further. These are to help you make more progress in science in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. You can help by making sure you work especially hard in these subjects. The other is to help those who are responsible for subject departments to check more easily whether plans for improving their subject are working as well as they should.

Best wishes for your future

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector