

Beacon Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124908
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328241
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	149
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Albert Collins
Headteacher	Mr David Stewart
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2006
School address	Stone Lodge Lane West Ipswich Suffolk IP2 9HW
Telephone number	01473601175
Fax number	01473688882

Age group	5–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Beacon Hill is a day special school designated for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. In fact, the majority have additional needs which affect their learning and behaviour. A third of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders, just over a tenth have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), and about five per cent have speech, language and communication disorders. Pupils are admitted to the school because their attainments are generally very low; this is because of their special educational needs. They travel from Ipswich and the surrounding areas of Suffolk and some have up to an hour to travel to school. Most pupils are of White British origin; a very small number are from a range of different ethnic groups.

The school has a number of facets to its work. These include an autism outreach service, 'the county inclusive resource' (CIR), to support schools, pupils and families covering the whole of Suffolk. In addition there is 'phase 4', an on-site base to help up to 10 pupils who have been excluded from school or who are at risk of exclusion. These facilities are managed and run by the school through service level agreements with the mainstream schools for outreach and the local authority (LA) for 'phase 4'. All pupils remain on the roll of their mainstream school or on the LA 'education otherwise than at school' roll.

The school also manages an after-school club which can take up to 36 pupils registered at the school. Although the school can take pupils from the age of five, the local authority has confirmed that no pupils of Early Years Foundation Stage age would ever be admitted to the school.

Beacon Hill is a Leading Edge school and has a number of prestigious awards including Sportsmark Gold, Activemark Gold and Artsmark Silver.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an excellent school. It develops its pupils exceptionally well, enabling them to learn, make excellent progress and be outstandingly well prepared for the next steps in their education and life. The headteacher and senior staff work exceedingly hard to provide the best for pupils. They have an exceptionally clear vision of what they need to do and where the school needs to go in the future. The leadership team work for continuous improvement and strive to reach excellence in everything they do. Excellent improvement since the last inspection has enabled the school to build its significant strengths. The exceptional work of the headteacher in extending the scope and ability of the leadership team has built an excellent capacity to improve. Outstanding partnerships with schools and support services, the school's own exceptionally good provision including that in 'phase 4', its literacy and communication support and its outreach service all combine to make this school very successful. This is a school that reaches out to others and rightly sees its strength in the range of opportunities and provision these partnerships provide.

Many pupils have faced educational failure prior to being placed at Beacon Hill. The school is very successful in enabling pupils to learn. It successfully opens areas of knowledge to pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder which they have previously found confusing. It gives all pupils the confidence to try new things. Their achievement and personal development are excellent as a result. Leavers are proud of their school and their achievements and leave with a really good range of qualifications, suitable for their abilities and needs. Some pupils who were unable to attend any school in the past because they were fearful of education, demonstrate exceptional levels of confidence, such as one who sang a solo in front of peers in assembly during the inspection.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and regularly write to staff to thank them. They are very enthusiastic in their praise and often talk about the amazing progress their children make. Comments made to inspectors about their children include, '...his self-esteem, independence and resilience have leapt forward..', and '..he is thriving and excelling'. One parent whose son was out of mainstream education for two years stated, 'the staff...have given me my son back.'

A key strength is that all staff work closely together for the good of each pupil. Senior leaders check carefully on pupils' learning in conjunction with any impact on their behavioural, emotional and social development, and they use the information to adjust the provision and tailor it well to individual pupil's needs. This analysis is exceptionally well done and informs planning at all levels. Care, guidance, and support are outstanding. Last year the school faced a significant challenge from a small number of pupils with extreme BESD needs that it was asked to take. This led to an increase in exclusions, but managers carefully evaluated the provision and responded to pupils' views to make adjustments in practice and procedures. As a result, the number of exclusions has significantly reduced and the school is a calm place where behaviour is good.

The evaluation of pupils' progress has also improved considerably now that the school has sophisticated systems to track this and is using the data to identify trends and patterns. Senior and subject leaders have had an important role in developing systems but also know that there is still some room to improve some aspects of their analysis. The school has an extensive range of ways on checking its work and makes accurate judgements about its effectiveness.

However, it does not always summarise its findings in a way that demonstrates its understanding of its strengths and what contributes to them or make it easy for others, such as governors, to identify or question these.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The most remarkable lessons hold pupils' interest very well and give them really good strategies to learn. Teachers demonstrate an exceptional knowledge of pupils' needs and an understanding of how they learn and it is these aspects that make lessons so successful. The good curriculum, with its carefully planned combination of academic and vocational courses and the excellent range of clubs and out-of-school opportunities, gives pupils a breadth of experience. It prepares them particularly well through its careers and work related learning programme for the next stage.

Like the school itself, the outreach service is led and managed exceptionally well and is an excellent provision. Schools are unreserved in their praise of the CIR and wish they could have more access to the service. The impact of the 'phase 4' provision is remarkable and pupils with the most complex difficulties attend school regularly and learn exceptionally well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen school self-evaluation by ensuring that any summary analyses of the school's work accurately identify strengths, areas for development and draw on a range of evidence to support its judgements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All groups of pupils make excellent progress because staff pay very careful attention to the best ways in which they learn. This has a major effect on pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders in particular, and the school is adept at both reinforcing their learning and moving them on to try new ideas. Pupils' standards on entry to school are exceptionally low and even by the time they leave they are still low, however their progress and achievement is remarkable. The school is highly successful at improving pupils' readiness to learn, removing barriers and giving them the confidence to try new things. By the time they leave the school most pupils have gained Entry Level qualifications at Level 3. Although some still struggle with literacy by Year 11, they have still made excellent progress in all aspects of their English skills. Each year, the number of qualifications each pupil gains increases. Staff adapt the content of courses to ensure they are relevant to the cohort and give them the best possible chance of success. Teachers set challenging for pupils and they often exceed them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and give their wholehearted commitment to everything they do. As a result, attendance is excellent. The school is a calm place of learning and behaviour is good. The re-positioning of the 'time for me' session, where pupils can explore their feelings, to just after lunch has helped enormously to sort out any minor disagreements that have occurred during the less structured time.

Pupils are very polite and helpful to one another. They show great empathy and readily celebrate each other's achievements. They know they can put forward their ideas, such as through the school council, and that their views will be listened to. They feel extremely safe and state that the very small amount of bullying that occurs is dealt with swiftly by staff. They have great

confidence in the adults around them and relationships are excellent. Pupils make significant strides in their confidence and self-esteem and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. They understand extremely well how they can keep healthy and pride themselves in the considerable amount of physical activity and sport in which they participate. In science, they readily identify things that are healthy for them to eat. They are extremely well prepared for the future and the school gives them work-related and enterprise opportunities which make a significant impact on their maturity and understanding of the world around them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Lessons are highly interesting and very practical. As a result, pupils' ability to concentrate is often remarkable. Staff are highly aware of pupils' language levels and a significant strength in many lessons is the clear and carefully worded explanations they give pupils. Staff are very careful to increase pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in small, planned steps so that they are successful and learn thoroughly. Interactive whiteboards are used to great effect. The use of visual resources, together with movement activities, reinforce the learning of pupils' with autistic spectrum disorders excellently. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson these strategies were used to accelerate pupils' multiplication knowledge outstandingly well. Activities are generally planned precisely for the different needs of pupils in a class. Sometimes teachers do not clearly identify learning outcomes for all learners and do not set success criteria to judge their learning. The school knows this is a next step to improve teaching even further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides an extremely wide range of out-of-school activities, a rich and varied curriculum and well-planned opportunities support pupils' learning and progress. The curriculum is sensitive to pupils' needs. Leaders of subjects readily adapt planning to meet pupils' needs, for example information and communication technology is used to develop programmes to a higher level and accelerate learning for some pupils. The school offers a very good range of accredited courses and the curriculum meets statutory requirements. However, the programme for French is fairly narrow and, despite strong links with a school in France, the school knows that it needs to plan a broader range of experiences.

Literacy support has a significant impact on the progress of pupils who struggle with reading and writing. Similarly, the school's 'in-reach' assists pupils very effectively with their communication skills, helping them to use sign, symbols and improve their spoken language.

The after-school club is particularly well planned, organised and managed but the take-up by parents is disappointingly low. This is despite a thorough survey by the school which indicated that this was a service that parents wanted. However, some pupils are not able to attend because they live a long distance from the school and there is no transport provided if they stay after school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school demonstrates outstanding care and concern for its pupils and monitors their personal development and academic progress particularly carefully. It meets the requirements for safeguarding its pupils. The school continuously analyses the impact of its work on pupils' personal development and therefore has excellent information to adapt this support, which it does readily. Pupils who sometimes find difficulty in coping with their emotions attend the 'pit stop' – a good provision which supports their understanding of their feelings and the impact of their behaviour on others. Pupils are very aware of their personal targets and how to improve. Assessment is thorough and well used to inform planning. The needs of pupils are also monitored and supported extremely well through the very strong relationships with external agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher drives forward the programme of improvement rigorously and is excellently supported by the two deputies and senior leadership team. He is successful at binding the school community together and extending it into the local community. Community cohesion is good. This is based on a thorough knowledge of school, local and county-wide needs. This is supported by the highly successful and excellently managed outreach service which enables most pupils to remain within their own school.

Staff at all levels work tirelessly to ensure that pupils maximise their potential and the monitoring of this by senior and subject leaders has progressed significantly since the last inspection. The senior leadership team has been extended and there is a commonly understood and exceptionally clear sense of purpose at all levels. Subject leaders check on pupils' progress well and are now able to identify the reasons for any trends and patterns in performance. Governance is good and governors regularly visit the school and observe teaching and other aspects of its work. Some governors are new to their roles and are awaiting training, but all are particularly supportive of the school. The chair is particularly knowledgeable about the school's work and the school uses governors' expertise well. Value for money is excellent.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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
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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	1
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?	1

Leadership and management

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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

9 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Hill School, Ipswich, IP2 9HW

Your parents are most impressed with your school and so are we.

What an excellent school you have and you are certainly a credit to it! Mrs McCarthy and I could not help but be impressed with the excellent way you performed during assembly on the last day of the inspection. Your confidence grows enormously while you are at Beacon Hill and the school is really good at helping you learn in the best ways possible. This is why your progress is excellent, you gain lots of awards, and you are really well prepared for college or work when you leave.

Mr Stewart works exceedingly hard to make the school the place it is and he has a great team around him. The staff support you excellently. They respond to your needs, ideas and concerns extremely quickly and change things rapidly to ensure you get the best out of school. I have asked Mr Stewart and all the staff to continue to check on how well you and the school are doing. I have also asked him to write what they find in such a way that it makes it easy for people like governors, inspectors and others to be able to pick out the main points easily and ask questions about the school's work.

Yours sincerely

George Derby

Lead inspector