

Beacon Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134767
Local Authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	328977
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	75
Sixth form	12
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Tony Fish
Headteacher	Mr Richard Milligan
Date of previous school inspection	19 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Errif Drive South Ockendon Essex RM15 5AY
Telephone number	01708 852006
Fax number	01708 851679

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Beacon Hill provides for pupils aged between three and 19 years old. Most have a statement of special educational needs or are undergoing an assessment for one. The large majority has severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties as their main area of need and visual or hearing impairments as additional needs. A few have autistic spectrum disorder or physical disabilities. As a result of pupils' disabilities, standards on entry to the school are extremely low and remain so throughout their school life. The majority of pupils are White British and live in Thurrock; a small number live in Essex and the London Borough of Havering.

There are six children in the Nursery and five in the Reception Year receiving Early Years Foundation Stage provision. The school has post-16 provision with 12 students on roll. The post-16 centre is in a new building which opened in September 2007 on the site intended for a new building for Beacon Hill School. The majority of pupils are in Key Stages 1 to 4.

The school became a specialist college for sensory and physical needs in September 2007. It provides an outreach service to local schools supporting their pupils who have physical disabilities and assessing their information and communication technology (ICT) needs. The school is piloting, in association with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), the Entry Level Foundation Tier related to the new 14 to 19 curriculum framework. Healthy Schools status was awarded in January 2007. The school has the Recognition of Quality Award for work-related learning and, in 2008, it gained the Sportsmark and Activemark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Beacon Hill School is outstanding because it is extremely effective in understanding and meeting the many and complex needs of its pupils. Furthermore, it is an increasingly successful school. Since becoming a specialist college for sensory and physical needs in 2007, it has expanded its role within the community exceptionally well by giving greater support to, and sharing more expertise with, parents, schools and groups providing services for children. The parents who have expressed a view are very happy because of the positive impact the school has on their children's well-being, progress and independence. Outreach work is outstanding and is supported by the growing partnerships the school has formed with many organisations. The school has improved enormously as a result of the vision, and ambition of the headteacher and governors.

Leadership and management overall are exceptional and the capacity for continuing improvement is outstanding. Excellent self-evaluation runs throughout the school and is pursued with rigour by the senior management team. Senior managers set challenging targets for the school and staff. Leadership roles throughout the school have widened and strengthened since the previous inspection and out of this there have been key developments. A sensory curriculum, a main strand of the school's specialism, permeates excellently through all of the work and activities pupils are offered. It has been implemented very successfully and is superbly resourced with expertise and equipment. The enormous sensory library, which is open to the community, is an example of excellent vision and leadership. Curriculum developments in the new post-16 centre have experienced the same great success. The focus is on students learning in the community and using a local college for a significant amount of their work and activities. The opportunities to gain accreditation in Key Stage 4 and post-16, which are vocational and work related, contribute to what is, overall, an outstanding preparation for the future.

At the core of the school's work is the promotion of pupils' personal development and its high quality provision ensures this is outstanding. Pupils develop a positive outlook and have a clear sense of purpose. They form friendships well, due to the constant encouragement for self-awareness, regard and respect for others. Pupils are happy and give a great deal of effort to managing the many responsibilities they are given. Their independence grows considerably as a result. Such success is a reflection of the dedication and expertise of all staff. The professional development of staff has improved through frequent training and supervision and the development of clear career pathways. As the needs of new pupils have widened and become more complex, the school has responded very positively with new resources and expertise. In this respect, provision for autistic pupils is of high quality. Teaching assistants gain much experience and skills and some go on to become qualified teachers. While it is mainly the case that teaching assistants offer really effective support, very occasionally with Nursery and Reception children this support is not sharply focused on helping them to learn. Nevertheless, provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and results in children making good progress. The care and support provided across the whole school is outstanding ensuring pupils stay safe and learn about healthy lifestyles.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Pupils' needs are assessed thoroughly leading to precisely planned lessons. Teachers' knowledge of pupils and their considerable expertise in meeting their needs gives them the confidence to organise work and activities that are often tremendous fun for pupils. As a result, they learn in extremely effective ways, concentrating, working hard and contributing in a lively fashion. This leads to their outstanding achievement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Post-16 provision is outstanding because the programme of work and activities for students is very sharply focused on promoting their independence. Confidence and self-esteem are greatly enhanced by the adult ethos so well established in the new purpose built post-16 centre. It provides excellent accommodation and resources, acting extremely effectively as a base for a very wide range of learning opportunities. Students thoroughly enjoy their work and make considerable efforts to succeed. The staff have very high expectations and students respond very positively with cooperation and managing many responsibilities. Their needs are exceptionally well met, they are cared for and kept safe to an outstanding extent. A significant proportion of students' work and activities take place away from the centre. This is in colleges principally, but also in the community through work-experience placements and accessing many local services and amenities. Students have a considerable amount of scope to choose courses which reflect their interests and strengths. The partnership with the local college is excellent because of their commitment and cooperation which has helped significantly the post-16 centre to meet its aims. Links with the careers service, health and social services are very strong. Each year most students who leave go on to college full-time and a lively post-19 community has developed at college as a result.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in all areas of their learning. This is due to good teaching and excellent care for children's welfare and happiness. Good teamwork is generally combined with an excellent knowledge of each child. Regular focused training means staff are very skilled in dealing with children's increasing health and personal needs. Lessons are carefully planned to help children take the small steps needed for their learning and development. Their personal development is outstanding. A wide range of ways to help children communicate with others are used, with much success. For example, many children showed clear enjoyment at being placed in the middle of the group with the parachute soaring over them. Several communicated in one way or another that they wanted more of the parachute activity showing they were making rapid progress towards their targets. Occasionally, teaching assistants, although their intentions are good, intervene too much with children, hindering their scope for freedom and independence and reducing their otherwise good pace of learning.

There are strong relationships with parents and prospective parents, particularly through the well-established 'School for Parents', which particularly helps children's physical development. Good use is made of video recordings to show parents the progress their children are making. Assessment systems are firmly established and used effectively to plan for individual children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the teamwork in Early Years Foundation Stage provision to ensure children have every opportunity to develop independence

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 and post-16 is outstanding. At these points pupils complete a wide variety of assignments gaining accreditation on ASDAN's Transition Challenge

and Towards Independence courses. This is the result of the sustained progress made by pupils from when they enter the school until they leave. Rapid progress is promoted by a curriculum which is extremely relevant to the wide range of pupils' needs. The sensory curriculum ensures that all pupils, and those with the most complex needs in particular, make substantial progress in their awareness, interaction, participation and enjoyment in the world around them. Teaching, driven by clear objectives, ensures pupils develop a wide range of essential skills giving them independence. Pupils acquire and refine communication skills using many technological resources, signing and symbols, and by building very effectively on their speaking skills. The majority make exceptional progress in developing physical skills and creativity. Many have a good knowledge of the world and the skills to manage everyday demands by themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding and excellent provision is made for pupils to become confident, independent individuals. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding. Pupils are outgoing and communicative as these qualities are expertly nurtured by staff. Great emphasis is placed on pupils developing effective social skills and, as a result, their independence develops exceptionally well. They support each other and work together well, often without adult help. Pupils are managed very well and this leads to excellent behaviour. Pupils are safety conscious, feel safe and show great consideration and kindness to others. The immense fun and excitement in learning brings huge enjoyment and develops really good attitudes to school, which is reflected in good attendance. There is a clear understanding of how to eat healthily and many enjoy the physical activities organised for them such as swimming and particularly trampolining, which is a great favourite. Pupils make exceptionally good contributions in school and beyond. Older pupils take on lots of responsibilities, such as running the tuck shop and playing a central role in whole-school assemblies. There is an active school council whose views are listened to and acted upon, such as, with the purchase of new playground equipment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers and their assistants work together extremely effectively most of the time. They know their pupils very well and are highly trained in meeting their needs. Team work is strengthened by the contributions of the speech and language therapist to pupils' communication skills and of physiotherapists and occupational therapists in meeting pupils' physical and medical needs. Lesson planning is very focused as a result of teachers' thorough assessments and those of the other professionals involved with pupils. Lesson objectives are comprehensive and clear and pupils' individual targets are closely matched to their needs and capabilities. Teachers' knowledge of pupils and their expertise in meeting their needs leads to very lively, briskly paced lesson activities. As a result, learning and progress in lessons are very effective. Pupils enjoy learning, which is why their engagement and participation is so high. The use of very good ICT and a rich variety of other resources adds to pupils' interest and their access to learning. Their work is challenging and it instils in pupils increasing confidence and capability.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is planned exceptionally well to meet pupils' needs, build on their strengths and stimulate their interest. It is broad and very well enriched to offer opportunities for all pupils to experience and achieve as much as they can in school and beyond. A wide variety of communication aids such as signing, symbols, electronic aids and sensory approaches are in use in all classes, ensuring there is an appropriate engagement for all in learning. The school has developed excellent topics in Key Stages 1 and 2 that are very well matched to pupils' needs and create a great deal of enjoyment. Team-teaching arrangements for whole groups of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils offer considerable flexibility in planning their curriculum to best meet the wide range of pupils' needs and capabilities. Excellent personal, social and health education results in outstanding achievement in these areas. Monitoring of progress is robust and effective in the further planning of the curriculum and lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

A warm and welcoming atmosphere pervades the school, reflecting just how important pupils' happiness and welfare are to all of the staff. The outstanding care and support provided enhances pupils' personal development. Robust systems are in place to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and well looked after. In every part of the school there is highly effective support for the personal needs of every pupil. There are excellent links with outside agencies; a nurse works in the school to support a child with complex medical needs; and the speech and language therapist has initiated training and support for staff to develop pupils' communication skills. Pupils are made very aware of health and safety such as how to make an emergency exit from the swimming pool. A key strength of assessment is the regular notes taken of small steps in progress and the extensive use of photography and video to provide evidence of progress. These are put together as albums and digital recordings for parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's clear direction and purpose, evident in the good leadership seen at the time of the previous inspection, has been strengthened substantially by the continued drive of the headteacher, senior staff team and governors. It was the governors' aim that the school develop a high profile in the community by sharing its expertise and influencing local educational developments. The support on meeting sensory and physical needs provided to individuals, schools and groups is excellent. The substantial investment in the sensory resource library, 'Aladdin's Cave', is proving to be very valuable to parents, playgroups and schools. The many ways in which the school engages with its community, understands and meets its needs, make an excellent contribution to community cohesion. The developments in the sensory curriculum and in post-16 provision stand out, in particular, as significant improvements. Specialist status has provided the school with clear targets to achieve. The first year's targets have been met or exceeded, which has led to setting even more challenging targets for the second year.

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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?	1	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	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2	

Achievement and standards

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

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Hill School, South Ockendon, RM15 5AY

Our visit to your school was a very pleasant experience for us. It was made extremely enjoyable seeing how happy you all are and how keen you are to do well in school. We would like to say thanks to all of you and especially to the pupils and students who met with us to share their views about school.

We had to decide how good your school was and we have judged it to be outstanding because you are given an extremely good education. All of the staff are very good at taking care of you and making sure you learn everything you need to. You are extremely well prepared for the future and it is good that so many students leave and go on to college. In all of the time you spend in school, you achieve outstandingly well. This is because your work and activities and how they are taught make learning fun and this gets the very best from you. We were very impressed by your confidence and how helpful you are to the school and each other.

Your headteacher and all of the staff have worked incredibly hard to make your school as outstanding as it is and are determined to go on making it even better. We have asked your headteacher to ensure that the teaching of Nursery and Reception children provides the excellent opportunities for learning that we have seen throughout the school.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector