

The Beacon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125306
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	330220
Inspection dates	6–7 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Barry Jones

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1129
Sixth form	162
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Dr G Spedding
Headteacher	Mrs J Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2007
School address	Picquets Way Banstead SM7 1AG
Telephone number	01737 359103
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Beacon School is larger than average. The school receives students from over 70 primary schools drawn from a wide geographical area. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties. The school achieved specialist status for Media Arts in 2006. The school has the Healthy Schools and Artsmark awards.

The school was inspected in December 2007. It was judged to require special measures because achievement and standards and leadership and management were inadequate. An interim headteacher was appointed in January 2008 and she was confirmed as the substantive headteacher in May 2008. The governing body was dissolved in Spring 2008 and replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB) with a shadow governing body.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school no longer requires special measures. A remarkable amount has been achieved in a relatively short time. The new headteacher has led its recovery exceptionally well. She has galvanised the staff and is ably supported by her new management team. Visitors to the school comment positively on the transformation in the school ethos. Consequently, the school's reputation in the community is growing.

This is an improving school. There is better teaching, rising standards and achievement and attendance has significantly improved. The 2008 GCSE results were the best ever. The school's monitoring shows that this trend is continuing and that the school is on track to further raise standards in 2009. However, this is from a low base. The rise in standards means that they are now broadly average. Given their average starting points, students' achievement during their time in the school is now satisfactory overall. However, there is more work to be done. The proportion of good teaching has increased in the last year but teaching is not yet consistently good. Given the legacy of underachievement, this means that some older students do not make up gaps in their knowledge and skills. Teachers manage their classes well but differ in their ability to vary the tasks set and consequently not all students are challenged sufficiently. In some classes this means that students do not make the progress they should.

Students confirm that the quality of their education is improving. They enjoy school and speak warmly about it. They feel safe. They behave well and this is shown by the low and much reduced level of exclusions. The students respond positively to the good pastoral support. The school has successfully changed its management structure so that there is closer linking between pastoral and academic guidance. Academic guidance varies from satisfactory to good. The best practice is found in the support of Year 11 students. However, not all students' underperformance is quickly identified because the tracking procedures are not consistently implemented in all year groups.

The school missed its targets in specialist subjects when the standards in the school dipped to be below average in recent years. However, these subjects have contributed significantly to the rising trend and standards are generally higher than in other subjects. The English department has helped other subjects to develop students' literacy skills. The school's contribution to the local and wider community is good. The Media Arts department has provided valued workshops in local primary schools.

The catalyst for the improved fortunes of the school is the excellent headteacher. Where she has led, others have followed. Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve have been raised. The school takes robust action when weaknesses in teaching are identified. Rigorous monitoring has been allied to imaginative support to help teachers to improve. This has been underpinned by good support from the local authority. Systems of accountability have been strengthened and are now secure. The IEB is a very effective critical friend. Given the strong leadership and management and the significant improvement in the last year, capacity to improve further is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Pass rates at A level are average. Standards are below average overall because fewer students gain the higher grades than in most sixth forms. This reflects the below average starting points of the students. Achievement is satisfactory overall. However, this masks differences between subjects. The senior managers are now taking decisive action to remedy these inconsistencies. In previous years in some subjects, students have not done as well as they should have in external examinations. Heads of department for these subjects have been required to improve provision and support has been provided to teachers where necessary. The school's monitoring shows that this is leading to improvements but more remains to be done. The specialist subjects of drama, music and media are prospering and the range of courses has increased in these subjects. Although teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, it is good in these subjects.

The school's self-evaluation and monitoring and evaluation are satisfactory but the procedures are not as strong as in the main school. The school has focused its efforts on addressing the issues identified in the previous inspection which all related to the 11-16 age range. It is now giving more attention to the sixth form. For example, the school has identified weaknesses from a scrutiny of external examination results but did not identify these early enough from its own monitoring. The curriculum is being reviewed and courses amended in the light of the school's findings. Under the leadership of the new acting head of the sixth form there are a number of new initiatives, for example, changes in the curriculum but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good throughout the school so that all students make good progress.
- Ensure that procedures to identify underperformance are implemented consistently in all year groups and followed by effective action.
- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form and evaluate the impact of recent initiatives to ensure that all students make good progress.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The previous report in 2007 found that achievement was inadequate. Support was stepped up and focused initially on Year 11 students. Initiatives included rigorous monitoring of performance, mentoring, extra classes and ensuring that all students completed coursework on time. As a result, in 2008 the proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades increased by 9% and by 4% when English and mathematics are required to be two of the subjects. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive satisfactory support and make the same progress as their classmates. The school has some good teaching assistants and students make good progress when there is specific, targeted support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Their appreciation of international events and their implications are less well developed. They show respect for one another and perceive that behaviour in the school has improved markedly in the last year. As one student said, 'Behaviour has been much better since the new headteacher came.' They contribute generously to charities and make a good contribution to the community. They also work enthusiastically with primary school pupils through drama, music and other activities. The school council take their role seriously and say that their views are valued. For instance, their suggestion for changing the school uniform was adopted. They have a satisfactory understanding of healthy-living issues. They receive good careers advice. Their preparation for the next stage is satisfactory overall, given their average basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers manage their classes well so that lessons are conducted in an orderly and purposeful atmosphere. They use a range of strategies to meet the different learning styles of the students but do not always implement their plans effectively. Students appreciate that there are more opportunities to work practically and to work things out for themselves. Good teaching was seen in half of the lessons observed by the inspectors. In all subjects teachers identify in their planning how to provide opportunities to extend students' literacy skills. For instance, students are given the key vocabulary in science and they gain confidence in their use. However, teachers do not consistently provide the opportunities for developing literacy that they have planned or do not check that all students have understood.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Provision for numeracy and literacy are satisfactory and improving. The school has good links with colleges which allows it to offer a wide range of vocational courses. The school has reviewed this arrangement for two reasons. Some students did not receive appropriate qualifications and there were too many clashes with other subjects being studied. This meant that some students fell behind because they missed key lessons. Consequently, the curriculum for these students has been rightly revised in Year 10. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum has been a weakness but is being addressed rigorously. The provision for students' personal and social education is good and contributes significantly to their good personal development. The curriculum is considerably enhanced by the school's specialist subjects and there is good take up in the sixth form. There is also a good range of extra-curricular activities that are popular.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral support is good and contributes significantly to the students' good personal development and well-being. There are good links with a wide range of agencies which means that vulnerable students receive the support they need. Newly-developed management systems

are effective and staff work well as a coordinated team. A vigorous drive to raise attendance has been successful, both in the main school and in the sixth form. This has been through an extensive reward system and the strengthening of other initiatives, such as attendance panels and calls to parents on the first day of a student's absence. Students' behaviour has improved significantly through raised expectations and the consistent implementation of agreed procedures by all staff.

A new system for tracking students' attainment and progress has recently been introduced. It is working best in Years 9 and 11. Where underperformance is identified, appropriate support is provided. However, the system is not yet embedded in all years. Students know their end of key stage targets and say these motivate them to aim high. Although improved since the previous inspection, teachers still vary in the quality of constructive feedback they give to students and not all know how they might improve further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A new management team has quickly tackled the inadequacies identified in the previous report. The focus has been unerringly on raising standards through improved teaching but recognising that this can only be accomplished if students behave and attend well. There has been rapid progress on all these fronts. The headteacher's clear, resolute leadership shines through. Staff value the increased opportunities to exercise responsibility. For instance, the management of the work relating to the school's specialist status has been recently delegated and this is bearing fruit. Staff know clearly what is expected and respond accordingly. A strong culture of accountability has been established. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well and is constantly seeking to use this information to improve further. Systems for analysing data have improved. These are good for checking the progress of individual students. They are not yet used to maximum potential to check trends and patterns for particular groups of students, for instance, to analyse the impact of new arrangements for the curriculum in Year 10.

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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?	3	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	2	3

Achievement and standards

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

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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**

17 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Beacon School, Banstead, SM7 1AG

Thank you for your help and cooperation when we inspected your school. You told us that the Beacon is an improving school and we agree. You told us that behaviour has improved since your new headteacher arrived. Your school council members say their views are valued. Their submission that school blazers were not popular with students was accepted. However, they remain unimpressed by the state of the toilets!

As you know, your school was judged to require special measures in the previous inspection. We find that it has improved significantly in a relatively short time. Much credit for this is due to your excellent headteacher and the support she has from her staff. You have played your part by attending more frequently. These are the main ways in which the school has improved.

- You are making better progress in your work.
- There is more good teaching.
- Everyone says behaviour has improved.
- The school takes good care of you.
- Attendance is much better in the main school and in the sixth form.
- The school's specialist subjects of English, drama music and media are helping to make life better for you and others in the community.

There are three things that we have asked the school to do in order to keep moving forward.

- Ensure you all get consistently good teaching.
- That the school keeps a check on the progress you all make and take action when you fall behind.
- Make sure the recent changes in the sixth form lead to students making good progress in all their subjects.

We wish you success in the future. Keep attending and behaving well. Make sure you ask if you do not understand - the teachers will be very pleased to help you.

Yours sincerely

Barry Jones Lead inspector