

Benfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108526
Local Authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	337100
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	820
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Todd
Headteacher	Mr J Walker
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2006
School address	Benfield Road Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tyne and Wear NE6 4NU
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 29 lessons taught by 29 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders, staff, students and the National Challenge Advisor. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at: school improvement planning; school self-evaluation, school and local authority data and students' work. They also scrutinised 76 parental, 53 staff and 420 students' questionnaires. Most students in Years 11, 12 and 13 were not in school during the inspection, but inspectors observed a small number of revision lessons and spoke with a group of Year 13 students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities learn and make progress
- how well students achieve during their time at school, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form
- the success of the school's strategies to improve attendance
- the effectiveness of the care, guidance and support provided for students.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most secondary schools. Most students are of White British heritage. There are small numbers of students from a number of other ethnic groups and a very small proportion of students are refugees or asylum seekers. Twenty three languages are spoken in school, but very few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average and the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for a free school meal is twice the national average. The school is a specialist school for sport. A new headteacher was appointed in 2008. An extensive three year refurbishment of the school building was completed in March 2010. The school has received a number of external awards and accreditations including Investors in People, Artsmark Gold and awards from Sport England.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The headteacher and staff have sustained the improvements identified during the last inspection and they have tackled most of the remaining weaknesses within the school. As a result, outcomes for students of all abilities are improving rapidly. Leadership is generally good but the leadership and management of teaching and learning is no better than satisfactory because some senior and middle leaders do not lead improvement in their subject or area rigorously enough. The school provides good value for money. It has good capacity for further improvement.

When students join the school their attainment is below and sometimes well below average. Teaching is generally good and the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, is well matched to students' needs and interests. As a result, students make good progress by the end of their time in school, although progress is better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3 or in the sixth form. The specialism has a very positive impact on students' enjoyment of school and it enriches the curriculum. It is not yet having sufficient impact on raising achievement.

There is some variation in the quality of teaching both within and between departments because teachers do not always use the outcomes of longer term and day-to-day assessment to plan work that meets the needs of all students in the class. As a result, although most students make good progress in lessons, the most able students are not always challenged enough. Students' attainment, as measured by national examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, is low but it is improving. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is improving rapidly and in 2009 was higher than the national average. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics remains below average but is also improving rapidly. The rate of improvement is better than that found nationally. .

Many students have weaknesses in their literacy skills when they join the school and this has a negative impact on their attainment, particularly in English. The school is aware of this and it is beginning to tackle the issue. There is a whole-school focus on literacy and staff have been provided with training and resources. Although there is some inconsistency in the extent to which teachers identify and eradicate weaknesses in students' spelling, grammar and punctuation, it is evident that improvements in students' skills are being promoted in all subjects. Students' work is marked regularly but marking does not always provide students with clear guidance that helps them to improve.

The provision made for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved and as a result they make good progress. The school supports students with

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physical disabilities well. The curriculum is increasingly well adapted to their needs and the school responds very positively to any difficulties that might affect their attainment. In recent years a very high proportion of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, were excluded from school. This figure has declined significantly. The reward system encourages students to behave well and aim high. As a result, students' behaviour is usually good.

The school cares for and supports students well and it provides them with effective guidance. Despite the school's best efforts students' attendance remains low but it is improving. The proportion of students that are persistent non-attenders has declined significantly. Although the figure remains above average, it includes some students with medical needs who have unavoidable absences and some students that have joined the school at other than the usual time and have had poor attendance at their previous schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve students' attendance.
- Improve the achievement of students in all key stages, by:
 - ensuring that teachers take account of information from assessment when planning lessons in order to provide challenging teaching for students of all abilities, especially the most able
 - providing students with guidance that tells them how to improve their work
 - identifying and eradicating weaknesses in students' spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Improve the leadership of teaching and learning, by:
- -ensuring that all middle and senior leaders monitor teaching and learning robustly and promote improvement in their subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The school exceeded its National Challenge target in 2009 and school data indicate that recent improvements will be sustained in 2010. The school tracks students' progress carefully and collects information about their achievement at regular intervals throughout the year. Most students make good progress in lessons because they are given interesting tasks that help them to consolidate their understanding and develop new skills. In some lessons, students are encouraged to evaluate their own work or that of their peers and some students provide perceptive written evaluations of their progress. Most students have positive attitudes to learning. They respond well in lessons and complete their tasks to the best of their ability. Students are increasingly well prepared for life after school. The school has taken very effective action to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn and make progress. The behaviour of a small number of students does not always meet the school's expectations. These students are taken out of lessons for a few days and they work in a separate room away

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from their peers, doing work set by their teachers. Students who still find it difficult to conform attend a 'twilight school'. Parents are generally supportive of the school's efforts and students that might otherwise have been excluded stay in school and continue their education. The number of students that choose to stay on at school into the sixth form is increasing each year. However, despite the school's best efforts the poor attendance of some students has a negative impact on their achievement and a small proportion of students leave school without gaining any qualifications. Students' social, moral spiritual and cultural development is good and they make a satisfactory contribution to the school and local community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

In the most effective lessons, students are given interesting tasks that motivate them and help them to succeed. In these lessons teachers have high expectations of their students and of what can be achieved. Teacher talk is kept to a minimum and students have enough time to complete their tasks and evaluate their progress. Students are encouraged to provide evidence and clear explanations to support their answers and any

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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mistakes or misconceptions are identified and eradicated. In most of these lessons, students are given well targeted and effective feedback that helps them to see what they have achieved. In lessons that are not as successful, teachers do not make enough use of information from day-to-day or longer-term assessments when planning work for students of different abilities. As a result the tasks provided for students are not always well enough matched to their needs. This means that although all students make progress the most able students are not always challenged enough.

The curriculum is good and it is having a very positive impact on students' achievement. Students spend two years in Key Stage 3 and three years in Key Stage 4. This provides a great deal of flexibility and it is helping to improve students' attainment. Some students pursue GCSE courses over three years and gain higher grades than they might otherwise have done and others can attain a wider range of qualifications. The exceptionally good resources for physical education (PE) and sport provide very good opportunities for students to participate in very prestigious events, receive good-quality coaching and take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

The school cares for, guides and supports students well. Students say that they feel safe and that there is very little bullying. The school has very effective arrangements to promote students' welfare. Each year group has welfare leaders who work with students and their families on social, emotional and behavioural issues. This promotes strong partnerships between home and school and many parents are very positive about the support that they and their children have received. The school listens to students' views and many of the recent improvements in the provision made for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are the direct result of concerns raised by students. Students are given effective careers guidance and the school ensures that they can choose from a wide range of options that interest them and help them to gain the qualifications that they will need in their future lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership of the headteacher is good. He has identified and tackled some significant and long-standing weaknesses and he is promoting improvement in all aspects of the schools work. He is very well supported by the deputy headteacher. She has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and its areas for improvement and she makes a strong contribution to the improvement process. The leadership of

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teaching and learning is satisfactory. Some senior and middle leaders promote improvement in their subjects or areas very effectively but this is not always the case. The governing body carries out its responsibilities effectively. It ensures that all its responsibilities are met. The school's arrangements to safeguard its students are good. The school knows its own and the wider community well and it makes a strong contribution to community cohesion. All students are fully included in the life of the school. There are effective partnerships with a range of schools and other agencies and this makes a good contribution to the achievement of individual students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is satisfactory. The number of students joining the sixth form is increasing and more students remain in the sixth form than did so in the past. In recent years the outcomes of examinations have been disappointing. They have been close to but generally below the national average. Nearly all students attain A to E grades but the proportion that attain the highest grades is low. The 2009 results were particularly disappointing and the school did not add the value to students' attainment that might have been expected. The head of sixth form tracks students' attainment carefully but tracking within departments is too variable. In some subjects, students receive very effective feedback that helps them to understand how well they are progressing but this is not the case in all subjects. Students' behaviour is good and they say that they enjoy school. There is a reasonably wide range of subject choices and the school maintains courses even when student numbers are very low. The school is aware that there is a

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drain on the budget and it plans to arrange some collaborative working with other local schools.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A small proportion of parents and carers returned their questionnaires. Most of the responses were positive or very positive. Inspectors also looked at some letters from parents and carers that had been sent to the school. Most of the parents and carers that responded are very happy with all that the school provides. They feel that the headteacher leads the school well and that staff are very approachable. Most feel that partnerships with the school are strong and that their children receive good support. Inspectors agree with these views. A very small proportion of parents and carers feel that their children are not taught well enough and that there is a great deal of bullying. Inspectors agree that some teaching is satisfactory and this is noted in the report. There is no evidence to suggest that bullying is a significant issue. Students said that if any bullying does occur it is dealt with to their satisfaction.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Benfield School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 76 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 820 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	34	37	49	12	16	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	33	43	40	53	2	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	50	29	38	9	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	33	48	63	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	30	50	66	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	26	41	54	6	8	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	25	41	54	8	11	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	34	40	53	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	36	43	57	5	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	45	32	42	6	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	21	45	59	5	7	3	4
The school is led and managed effectively	28	37	43	57	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	39	40	53	4	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Benfield School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 4NU

Thank you for being so helpful when I inspected your school with other members of the inspection team. I am sure that you will be pleased to learn that we think your school is a good school. You make good progress in many lessons and achieve well by the end of your time in school. This is because most teaching is good and the curriculum is well matched to your needs. Attainment is rising and in 2009 the proportion of you that gained A* to C grades at GCSE was above the national average. The proportion that attained these grades in English and mathematics also improved, but it remained below average. Some of you have weaknesses in your written work. The school has introduced strategies that should help you improve your writing skills in all subjects, but some teachers do not provide you with enough guidance to help you improve your writing and your understanding. We have asked the school to ensure that you receive feedback about how well you are doing and what you must do to improve.

The school cares for and supports you well and you receive effective personal guidance that helps you to make choices about your future. More students stay on to sixth form than did so in the past and students told us that they enjoy lessons, but students' attainment by the end of Year 13 is satisfactory rather than good because too few students attain the highest grades in examinations. Most of you behave well but a very small proportion of students do not conform to the school's expectations. Twilight school and the inclusion room ensure that they can continue with their education without disrupting others. As a result, exclusions from school have declined significantly.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead the school well but some middle and senior leaders do not check the work of staff and lead improvement in their subjects rigorously enough. We have asked the school to ensure that all leaders carry out their work effectively. The school has done all it can to improve your attendance. Despite their best efforts it remains low although it is improving. Students with poor attendance do not achieve as well as their peers and some leave school with no qualifications. It is now up to some of you to ensure that you attend regularly.

We enjoyed our visit and we wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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