

Beacon Hill Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112375
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	337914
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Johnson 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Trevor Gear
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
School address	Market Square Aspatria Wigton CA7 3EZ
Telephone number	01697 320509
Fax number	01697 322510
Email address	headteacher@beaconhill.cumbria.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, looked at 66 parental questionnaires and analysed questionnaires filled in by staff and students. Key documents such as the school self-evaluation report, governors' minutes, policies and procedures were also examined.

- how well the curriculum is matched to the needs and aspirations of students
- the impact teaching has on improving students' literacy and numeracy
- improvements made to enhance different groups of students' progress and learning
- the spiritual and cultural awareness of students.

Information about the school

Beacon Hill Community School is a smaller than average secondary school with specialist technology status and is part of the Rural Academy of Cumbria. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the percentage of students with statements of special educational needs. There are more boys than girls in the school and all are from White British backgrounds. The school holds the National Healthy School award and has been given several awards since the previous inspection including the Inclusion Charter Mark.

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 school provides a good education to all groups of students and is improving at a speedy pace.

The headteacher has driven impressive improvement in almost all aspects of the school's work in the last three years. She is ably assisted by the deputy and together they have developed an ambitious plan to raise standards even further. Most students enter the school with below average standards in literacy and numeracy. A key priority has been to improve GCSE examination success in English and mathematics; the proportion of A* to C grades has doubled and is now in line with national averages, although the proportion attaining the highest grades remains low. Initiatives to improve the quality of teaching have worked well and learning is good in most lessons. Students know their targets and what they need to do to improve. They behave well and work hard, particularly in lessons they find enjoyable and interesting. The number of exclusions from the school has greatly reduced and the school has a very inclusive ethos. Parents are very positive about the school, particularly its leadership. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress although very occasionally teachers' expectations could be even higher. Attendance levels have improved and the small number of students who are persistently absent from school has been reduced. Students have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles.

The small size of the school presents many challenges to ensure it meets the needs of students; despite this a good curriculum has been developed. Its technology specialism has enabled it to build appropriate vocational options. This has reinforced its ability to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of students, for example, by providing options for horticulture and engineering. Examination results in design technology are high.

Students feel extremely safe in school and have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives. Bullying is rare and behaviour good. Students' academic progress in most subjects has improved and is good; however, in one or two areas the improvement in progress has not been as impressive. Plans to address this are in place and are already having a positive impact. Many students enter the school with relatively low aspirations. The school does a lot to improve their confidence although the rewards system is not always used as effectively as it could be by some staff.

Morale amongst staff is very high and they are proud to work for the school. Teachers and managers are appointed with great care and well supported to ensure standards are high. The self-evaluation process is effective and leads to well focussed plans. In view of the clear progress that has been made across many aspects of provision and outcome,

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the school has demonstrated it has a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the rate of improvement in examinations results is consistently replicated across all subjects by:
 - enabling teachers to share good practice more effectively
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of students, including those with special educational needs and that the school's behaviour policy is always applied appropriately.
- Increase the proportion of students gaining the highest grades in examinations by:
 - ensuring the school rewards system is used more consistently and frequently in lessons especially for the more able students
 - raising the aspirations of students in the choice of their future careers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Most students join the school with levels of attainment that are below average and make good progress. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has doubled in the last three years and is now in line with the national average. Performance in the school's specialist subject, technology, is consistently high. There are a few exceptions to the overall trend of improvement in pass rates. The school has been quick to put in place plans for improvement in these subjects and school tracking data predicts improvements next year. Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and standards at the end of Year 9 are rising steadily.

Students recognise the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and participation in, and enthusiasm for, sport are excellent. They choose healthy food options and understand the dangers of smoking and drugs. Students cultural awareness is less well developed although their spiritual, moral and social development is good, as can be seen from the way they respect each other and their teachers. When they start school many students lack confidence in their own ability and set their sights too low. The school tackles this issue by reinforcing good behaviour, encouraging good attendance and regular homework. However, even more could be done to use the school merit system to recognise students' academic achievement in lessons, particularly those who are more able. Students make a good contribution to their community, for example, in their active participation in the school counsel and local charitable events. Students make good progress in developing the skills they need for their future employment and are particularly successful in information and communication technology (ICT). As a result the proportion progressing to employment or further education is very high. The development of a wider range of courses in literacy and numeracy has resulted in a higher proportion of students achieving basic skills qualifications. This has been particularly successful for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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Students feel safe in school and bullying is rare. The rate of exclusion was high but has fallen in recent years because the school has introduced a consistent system of sanctions that is clearly understood by students. Rates of attendance have improved and are around average, although the school still has a slightly higher proportion of students who are persistently absent than is the norm.

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	3
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	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Learning is well planned to ensure activities are well matched to students' levels of ability and their targets. Students know what is expected of them both academically and in terms of behaviour, and respond very positively. The pace of most lessons is kept high and activities are varied to meet the needs of different groups of students. Most students say they enjoy lessons, although they also say that the best lessons are those where more time is dedicated to the subject matter itself rather than analysing the learning process. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants. However, in a few lessons more could be done to ensure that targets for these students are clear and that the school's behaviour policy is

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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applied appropriately. Teachers use good questions to test understanding and marking is done frequently and effectively. Written comments about good work are frequently found in exercise books. However, teachers are less effective in the way they use the school merit system in lessons. There is good use of ICT and homework to develop research skills.

In this small school, the curriculum for students is adapted annually to meet their needs. There is an appropriate focus on practical subjects such as horticulture to match local employment need. The school's technology specialism has a strong impact, for example, the success rates in information technology and design technology are consistently high. The development of literacy and numeracy across subjects is good although in a few lessons there are missed opportunities to develop writing skills. New diplomas have been developed although so far few students are taking part in them. Vulnerable pupils and those at risk of disaffection have effective personalised learning programmes although occasionally teachers find it difficult to integrate these into lesson activities. The new 'learn to learn' programme in Key Stage 3 enables students to develop good team work and research skills. There is a broad range of extra-curricular activities with very high levels of participation. The school has a particularly strong sporting tradition that focuses on including as many students as possible.

The care, guidance and support students receive are good. Students say they feel safe and are treated as individuals. The school has good links with local primary schools, which ensure transition to the school in Year 7 is smooth. Good partnerships have been developed with specialist support agencies; for example, the work with the education welfare service has had a real impact on improving attendance. The school has developed a very inclusive approach to support and the rate of exclusion from school has reduced drastically in the last three years.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

Due to the outstanding leadership and ambition of the headteacher and the deputy outcomes for students have improved very significantly. The leadership team is extremely ambitious that the sharp trend of improvement continues. Appropriate action to steer the school towards its next phase of improvement is being taken. The self-evaluation process is very effective. Staff feel that they are well led and morale is very high. Heads of subject have a clear understanding of their targets for improvement,

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although there has been some inconsistency in examination success in a few areas that is not simply related to the varying ability of groups. Under performance is quickly identified and action plans for improvement put in place. The school has an imaginative approach to dealing with the challenges posed by its small size based upon the development of a flexible approach to curriculum design and the willingness of staff to take on a wide range of additional responsibilities. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good and inclusion is at the heart of the school.

The management of teaching and learning is good and has resulted in students making better and more consistent progress in most subjects. However, the school recognises that more could be done to allow teachers to observe and share good practice. Data on students' attainment are compiled meticulously and students and parents are well aware of targets. The system allows teachers to check easily and accurately the progress individual students make.

The school meets all statutory requirements for safeguarding students. There are a good range of partnerships with other organisations, including those to develop students' cultural awareness. Governors are very supportive of the school and have high aspirations for its future, although sometimes they rely too heavily upon reports from the headteacher to evaluate the quality of provision. The school plays a vital part in local community cohesion. Based upon the outcomes it achieves, the school represents good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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

Views of parents and carers

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The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the school. All were pleased about the way the school is led and managed and almost all feel that teaching is good. Very few parents voiced negative comments and of those most were related to ongoing behaviour issues or unresolved provision for individual support.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Beacon Hill Community 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 178 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	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)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	0	0	0	0	0	0	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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 pupil's 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.



20 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Beacon Hill Community School, Aspatria CA7 3EZ

Many thanks for the friendly welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we inspected your school this week. We would particularly like to thank the students we spoke to.

We think that your school provides you with a good education and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Here are some of the things we were particularly impressed by:

- the GCSE examination success rate including mathematics and English has doubled in the last three years
- the way the school is very well led and is continuing to improve
- the good teaching and the way you learn well in lessons
- the improved attendance rates which, for most of you, are above average
- the way that, despite its small size, the school provides a good curriculum
- your good behaviour and the support you receive.

The headteacher and her deputy worked with us to decide on some ways in which they will achieve their ambition to make the school outstanding. We decided that to achieve this, the school should:

- improve examination success rates across all subjects by making sure teachers share good practice and have equally high expectations of all of you
- make you even more ambitious and confident, so that you will attain even higher standards.

This is really good news and you should be exceedingly proud to attend such a good school. We would like to wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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