

Belmont School Community Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114308
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	338336
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Tom Grieveson 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	738
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Raymond Pye
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the large majority of their time evaluating the quality of learning. This included 28 lesson observations; an analysis of a large sample of students' workbooks for English, mathematics and science; and students' work was also examined in lessons. In addition, they held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. A telephone conversation was held with the one parent who requested it. The school's policies, improvement plans and a range of other information was scrutinised. This included 45 questionnaires returned from parents and carers.

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

- the extent to which teachers are using tracking and assessment evidence when lessons are being planned so that the needs of all students can be met
- the effectiveness by which the school tracks the performance of all students, identifies underachievement and intervenes to improve matters
- the impact of changes made at both middle and senior leadership levels to drive improvement, particularly in relation to teaching and learning
- whether the measures introduced to reduce absence and persistent absence and those to reduce exclusions are sufficiently effective and have enough capacity to be sustained.

Information about the school

The school is situated close to the A1(M) just to the east of Durham City. It is smaller than average in size. Almost all students are of White British heritage. Entitlement to free schools meals is in line with national rates. The school houses a resource base for hearing impaired and visually impaired students, who make up about 4% of the school's student roll. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is relatively high, particularly the number with a statement of educational needs. The school's extended catchment area covers a relatively large rural area with about two thirds of the students transported to school from surrounding villages. The school operates as a satellite centre for local sixth form provision offering courses in A/S level performing arts, dance, media and photography to over 100 sixth form students from other schools as well as for the school's own more-able and talented Key Stage 4 students.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Belmont provides its students with a satisfactory quality of education. It does some things particularly well, including the good care it offers to all students, but particularly to those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who have hearing or visual impairments.

Satisfactory improvements have been made since the previous inspection because senior leaders have acted robustly to tackle many of the long-standing difficulties which the school faces. They have shown great determination in raising the expectations of teachers about students' capabilities and have invested significantly in training and the sharing of good practice. Despite having to cope with considerable staffing problems there is notable impact from this work with about one third of teaching now being good or better. However, too much teaching remains satisfactory if standards are to rise in line with the challenging targets now being set.

By establishing a well-planned and thorough assessment regime the school is now able to track students' performance in meticulous detail. This is highlighting underachievement and providing a secure basis to intervene and target improvement. Better outcomes are already evident in, for example, the significantly better than average progress being made by most students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nonetheless, the use of this information is not routinely embedded in the practice of all teaching staff. While some teachers use this information very effectively to drive learning and achievement too many are not and this is limiting the progress of too many students.

Senior staff have worked diligently to improve the capacity and effectiveness of middle leaders in managing their departments but practice remains too variable and this is hampering improvements in some subjects. Effective leadership is evident, for example in the school's specialism, and its impact can be seen in a well-managed curriculum, students' good learning and progress and their enjoyment of lessons. However, it is not sufficiently apparent in some core subjects, including mathematics and science, where standards are not increasing quickly enough.

Standards attained in GCSE examinations are broadly average but have fluctuated since the time of the previous inspection. The majority of students make satisfactory progress although not all groups of students progress as well as they should. More-able students and particularly boys should make better progress and attain higher standards.

A robust approach is proving effective in reducing absence, persistent absence and exclusions. The large majority of students say that school is a safe place to be. They consider they are cared for well and know that support is available if needed. Most show

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respect for the welfare of others and this is particularly noticeable in relation to students with hearing or visual impairments. Behaviour is satisfactory, some is good but some is poor in those lessons where students' learning needs are not adequately met. The effective use of 'challenge' days supports the citizenship programme well. Students are engaged in a range of activities covering personal effectiveness in managing their own finances, applying for jobs and tackling issues such as racism. A combination of these activities is promoting students' understanding of community cohesion effectively although the school is yet to evaluate the impact of this work fully.

The school achieves satisfactory value for money and demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to raise standards and improve learning and progress for all students the school needs to:
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - make full use of all assessment information when planning lessons so that they take account of the learning needs of all students
 - raise their expectations of students' capabilities so that work is always sufficiently challenging, to promote good learning and progress
 - continue to share good practice through well-targeted training which meets the needs of all teachers.
- Improve the effectiveness of all middle leaders so that in all circumstances they accurately monitor, report on and take action to bring about improvements in:
 - the quality of teaching and learning
 - teachers' use of assessment information to inform lesson planning
 - the quality of marking and feedback
 - students' learning and progress
 - standards of work in students' books.
- Ensure that senior leaders routinely and robustly monitor the quality and impact of the work of middle leaders in driving improvement in their departments.
- Evaluate the impact of the school's work in promoting community cohesion.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The large majority of students make satisfactory progress in their learning although there are marked differences in the performance of some groups of students and between subjects. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including

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those students with hearing or visual impairments, make significantly better than average progress while some more-able students, mainly boys, do not achieve as well as they should. Students' achievement in English has been consistently better than in mathematics and science. Standards attained in GCSE examinations are broadly average although not enough students attain the highest grades, particularly in English literature and mathematics. Students performed exceptionally well in leisure and tourism, and single award performing arts, but in some other vocational subjects, notably applied information and communication technology and applied science, results were significantly below average.

In the majority of lessons, most students are keen to learn, engage willingly in activities and work productively with their classmates. When they are suitably challenged and work is matched carefully to their needs and interests the majority make good progress and show a real determination to extend their learning and deepen their knowledge. Where planning did not cater for students' needs well enough some lost interest and low-level disruption ensued. This slowed the pace of learning and distracted conscientious students from completing their work.

Students say they feel safe in school and know that staff will support them if difficulties arise. In congested corridor areas almost all show consideration for the safety and welfare of others and particularly for hearing impaired and visually impaired students. Their behaviour in most lessons and around the school is satisfactory. Where lessons are stimulating and engage students' interest their behaviour is good. However, the behaviour of a minority of students in some lessons is immature and disruptive to learning. Democratically elected school council members offered an eloquent summary of the good contribution made by the majority of students from opportunities to contribute to school life and events in the local community. Students' preparation for the next stage of learning or employment is satisfactory and attendance levels are average although there is a clear underlying improvement in lower absence and persistent absence rates in the current academic year. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory and addressed through a combination of well-organised challenge days and assemblies. The majority of students demonstrate a clear respect for the needs of others and show an understanding of those from other cultures and faiths in their discussions during the challenge day activities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is mostly satisfactory although about one third of observations showed good or better teaching. A small proportion of lessons were, however, inadequate.

In too many lessons teachers' expectations and the level of challenge offered to students are not high enough if standards are to rise and learning and progress are to improve consistently. In these lessons teachers' planning does not take enough account of assessment information when tasks are being prepared so that the needs of the whole class are not sufficiently catered for. Work tends to support the needs of average and lower ability students while the most able often do not progress as well as they should because activities do not progressively build upon their prior learning. However, there is much to celebrate about good teaching. In the very best lessons learning is planned to take full account of the most recent assessments. Students respond positively to activities which meet their needs fully. They rise to the challenge of teachers' probing questioning which helps to deepen their thinking and develops new insights into what they are learning. Students are encouraged to expect more of themselves and raise their expectations of what can be achieved. Detailed marking and helpful feedback in subjects such as modern foreign languages and in some aspects of English support students' understanding of their progress. However, too much marking is infrequent and lacking in evaluative feedback for students leaving them unsure about how well they have done or where improvement is required.

Strategic planning of the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, has emerged as a strength of the school. In Year 10 this now includes a much broader offer for students with about 50 studying level 1 or level 2 vocational courses. Partnerships with other

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schools and providers extends choice, further ensuring that courses more effectively meet students' needs and interests. The impact of these measures on students' outcomes is, however, yet to be seen fully.

The school's specialism is strengthening its contribution to other subject areas and to the life of the school. In English, for example, the use of drama is used effectively to support students' understanding of Shakespearean texts. In science, both drama and dance routines are helping students to extend their knowledge of abstract concepts. The range of specialist courses is broad, with increasing numbers of students showing enjoyment of these lessons and choosing to opt for them. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities do much to meet the needs and interests of students. However, long-, medium- and short-term curriculum planning is inconsistent and is relatively weak in some subject areas. A detailed scrutiny of students' work showed a poor match between the curriculum being taught and the abilities of students, most notably in mathematics and some aspects of science.

While the quality of guidance and support which students receive is satisfactory, the care they receive is good. It is particularly strong in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with a hearing or visual impairments. Transition arrangements meet students' needs both from primary schools and for students accessing further education and the world of work. The management of students' attendance has been strengthened and the impact on reducing absence rates and on those students who are persistently absent is beginning to show a marked improvement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and governors have ensured that core priorities for the school's improvement are focused securely on improving the quality of provision and raising standards and achievement. Self-evaluation is honest and accurate and is underpinning the school's efforts to improve those aspects of its performance where most progress is required. Revised assessment procedures and higher expectations of students' capabilities have resulted in much more challenging targets for all groups of students. Formal assessment procedures are very thorough with students' progress now tracked in exacting detail. However, the use of ongoing assessment by teachers to inform lesson planning remains variable and is weak in some departments.

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Senior leaders are taking robust actions to tackle weaknesses in teaching and learning and in some areas of middle leadership. The sharing of good practice and a significant investment in training is building capacity in both areas. The school has been badly affected by significant staffing difficulties but senior leaders have been steadfast in confronting these by establishing clear benchmarks from which performance can be measured.

Governors demonstrate an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weakness and are acutely aware of the issues which it faces. They recognise the improvements to the curriculum and to assessment in particular, and are resolute in their determination to improve teaching and learning and the quality and impact of middle leadership. They are challenging and expectant about the need to improve standards further. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and meet statutory requirements.

The school enjoys a positive relationship with parents and carers. A relatively small number responded to the inspection questionnaire and although the majority expressed confidence in the school, some of those who offered written comments raised concerns about the level of challenge for all students and the manner in which parents' and carers' concerns were dealt with. Partnership working with other organisations and agencies is satisfactory in promoting learning and accessing a range of support for students.

The school's drive to develop all aspects of community cohesion is satisfactory. Students are developing their understanding of modern society in the United Kingdom and of their place in the world through planned curriculum opportunities and visits. However, the school is yet to evaluate the impact of this work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire was small. While the majority of responses were supportive of the school, overall, written comments focused on the level of challenge for students in promoting their learning and the manner in which the school responds to parents' and carers' queries. Inspection evidence supports parents' and carers' concerns with regard to the level of challenge in some lessons and for some groups of students and the findings are contained in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Belmont School Community Arts College 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 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 738 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	24	28	67	2	5	2	5
The school keeps my child safe	11	26	25	60	2	5	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	9	21	22	52	8	19	2	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	21	19	45	8	19	3	7
The teaching is good at this school	8	19	17	40	11	26	2	5
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	14	17	40	13	31	2	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	12	25	60	7	17	3	7
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)	10	24	22	52	5	12	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	8	19	20	48	12	29	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	21	19	45	8	19	2	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	21	17	40	7	17	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	7	17	20	48	7	17	2	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	24	18	43	10	24	4	10

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



12 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Belmont School Community Arts College, Durham, DH1 2QP

Thank you for the part you played in supporting the inspection. In particular, can I express the inspection team's appreciation to those students who spoke with us in lessons, meetings, around the school and for completing the inspection questionnaire. Your views were taken very seriously in completing the report. We have found that Belmont provides you with a satisfactory education. The care it provides, particularly to those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with visual or hearing impairments, is, however, good. Some things have improved since the last inspection but there is much yet to do if all students are to achieve in line with their capabilities.

In order to help you all make better progress in your learning and attain the highest standards you can we have asked the school to concentrate on the following matters.

- To increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers make better use of the assessment information which they have so that the learning in all lessons is exactly matched to your needs.
- To make sure that the work of all teachers, in all departments, is monitored closely and that you receive good and accurate feedback on your work so that you know how to improve.
- To make sure that the senior staff check that subject leaders are effective in making important improvements in their own departments so that all are as good as the best.
- To make sure that the work you are doing to develop your understanding of your community, of society in the United Kingdom and its place in the world is evaluated by the staff so they are clear about where this work is being done effectively and where it needs to be improved.

You can all support the staff in this work, by always trying your best and by attending regularly. Please accept the team's very best wishes and good luck in all that you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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