

Beechen Cliff School

Alexandra Park, Bath, BA2 4RE

Inspection dates

19–20 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The strong tradition of academic and sporting excellence, along with the highly distinctive ethos within the school, means that pupils achieve extremely well.
- Pupils mainly study GCSE examination courses in Key Stage 4 and A levels in the sixth form. Results are well above average.
- Achievement in English literature, science, mathematics, history, geography and languages is outstanding.
- Excellent support for pupils with social and emotional problems means they successfully complete their time in school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Excellent leadership ensures pupils receive outstanding support and are very well prepared for their futures.
- Support for pupils who start school with below average reading and writing skills is highly effective in bringing about rapid improvements, particularly to reading levels.
- Outstanding teaching is highly motivational and ensures pupils are fully engaged and enjoy their work.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Pupils are courteous and polite.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptional. Pupils know that staff are prepared to give additional time, support and commitment to ensure they achieve well.
- Pupils make a very good contribution to their learning with their highly positive attitudes. They are very happy in school.
- Pupils have a very good awareness of how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet.
- The curriculum is highly motivating and pupils enjoy an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities, including many sports and cultural opportunities.
- The highly effective headteacher, along with senior leaders and governors, has an accurate overview of the school's many strengths, the quality of teaching and achievement. They use this to identify what needs to be improved.
- Governors have a set of core values which they apply to all new initiatives to make sure they constantly meet the needs of pupils and their parents and carers.
- Joint working as part of the Bath Education Trust is giving external evaluation of the school's work and bringing additional challenge.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons where they looked at pupils' work across the school year and observed teaching. Three of the 43 lessons were observed jointly with a senior leader. Inspectors also made three learning walks to observe specific aspects of learning or behaviour in a number of lessons.
- Inspectors took account of two responses from a parent or carer who emailed the inspection service provider, 110 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and analysed 64 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised pupils' books.
- Inspectors looked carefully at examination results for 2013, assessment records, including teachers' predictions for 2014, the governing body minutes and the school's development plans and evaluations. They also looked at safeguarding and other policies which were on the school's website.
- Inspectors met groups of pupils and staff, along with members of the governing body.

Inspection team

Michael Smith, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Valerie Houlday

Additional Inspector

Patrick Hazlewood

Additional Inspector

Teresa Gilpin

Additional Inspector

Robert Smith

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average sized boys' school with a mixed sixth form.
- The school converted to an academy in April 2011. When its predecessor school, also named Beechen Cliff School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- Around an eighth of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families), which is below average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the additional Year 7 catch-up funding is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is broadly average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- One pupil is educated full time at City of Bath College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is part of the Bath Education Trust with three other local secondary academies and a special academy, the local college of further education, the two local universities, and a global manufacturing company whose headquarters are in Bath.
- The school has recently opened a boarding provision for 24 pupils. At present there are three pupils using this provision. The new boarding provision will be inspected separately by Ofsted.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in English language so that it matches the outstanding achievement found in English literature and in other subjects.
- Build upon the outstanding practice within the school to ensure more teaching is consistently outstanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils start school with above average standards. In lessons and over time pupils respond excellently to make at least good and very often outstanding progress. Achievement for the most-able pupils is extremely high.
- In 2013 results for GCSE mathematics were outstanding. The proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress were well above the national average for boys. The most-able pupils made excellent progress with over a third of all pupils achieving an A or A* GCSE grade. As a result around a half of all A-level pupils are studying an A level in mathematics.
- In 2013 results for GCSE English language were good and outstanding for literature. For language, the proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress were in line with the national average for boys.
- The school does not routinely enter pupils early for GCSE examinations. However, this year a group of Year 11 pupils were entered for their GCSE English language in November. The results show a positive impact on the achievement of these pupils in English. Assessment information for other Year 11 pupils indicates that achievement will improve further this year.
- Achievement in science is outstanding, particularly for the most able. In 2013 around a third of pupils took three separate science GCSEs and results were well above average. Virtually all other pupils take double award science, again with excellent results.
- Achievement is outstanding in history and geography where the vast majority of pupils take at least one GCSE. Similarly, achievement in languages is outstanding with well over half the pupils taking a language GCSE.
- A-level results are well above average. Across the last three years the proportion of results which have been at grade B or better has steadily improved so that in 2013 almost two thirds of results were at this very high level. Results at AS level are not as good, although results in 2013 and early indications for 2014 show that achievement at the end of Year 12 has much improved and is now close to that for A level.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also make outstanding progress. They respond very well to additional support and extra help in lessons and over time. The school frequently checks on the progress of the pupil who is attending a local college to ensure he is achieving well.
- The school supports pupils who are identified as eligible for pupil premium funding very well. In 2013 a small group of such pupils needed a great deal of individual support during Years 10 and 11 because of significant social and emotional issues. These pupils all remained at school and gained the appropriate qualifications to go on to study at a local college. For these pupils, under these circumstances, this was excellent achievement.
- Pupil premium funding is used to give additional support for pupils, including for reading and writing. In Year 11 there is a group who have made significant improvements to their reading levels as a result of a designated literacy support teacher. This teacher is also making a significant impact in improving the literacy of pupils who arrive at school with below average levels of literacy. The gap between pupils eligible for pupil premium and others is reducing rapidly. For English and mathematics the gap is currently well below the national average and around a third of a grade. For languages the gap is getting larger but with eligible pupils outperforming those who are not eligible.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used highly effectively to support pupils who are taught in a small group with additional time for reading, writing and mathematics. This was so successful last year that this group have remained together in Year 8, where they also receive additional support.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching fully engages and motivates pupils to do their best and achieve excellently over time.

Relationships between staff and pupils are first class. Lessons are often lively and delivered with a fast pace so that pupils are continually having to think. For example the rapid questioning of pupils during a mathematics lesson meant they made excellent progress.

- Teachers know their pupils well so they are able to target questions towards individuals, for example, checking on pupils who were absent from the previous lesson or checking the understanding of pupils who sometimes take longer to grasp information or skills.
- Questioning is used very well to identify any misconceptions or errors. Teachers then use pupils' responses to explain to others and make sure they do not make similar mistakes.
- In sixth form lessons, learning is outstanding because staff plan a variety of activities that stretch and challenge all learners regardless of ability or starting point. Pupils enjoy taking greater responsibility for their own learning and feel it helps to prepare them for the style of learning they will meet if they go on to higher education. This includes opportunities for pupils to research and then write up their findings, which are then discussed with others.
- The quality of marking is always at least good with many outstanding examples. In the very best marking, for example in geography, teachers correctly identify what pupils need to do to improve their work and then give clear advice on how they could achieve better. Teachers in all subjects ensure pupils improve their reading and writing during lessons. For example, all rooms display the correct use of elements of language which are often confused. There is a very strong focus on improving reading standards so pupils are often asked to read out loud. Pupils are encouraged to share and discuss their ideas in order to sharpen the quality of their writing. In tutor groups pupils are encouraged to read widely, and staff and pupils discuss the novels they are currently reading.
- In mathematics lessons teaching ensures pupils fully understand the mathematics being taught. For example, teachers do not just accept answers but get pupils to explain their thinking behind their answer. Pupils also have opportunities to investigate mathematical problems so they then make connections for themselves.
- Virtually all parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed or strongly agreed that their child was taught well with a very high proportion saying that their child received appropriate homework.
- When teaching is good and not outstanding it is often because lessons do not engage and hold the attention of pupils fully and hence pupils do not learn as well.
- Pupils are provided with excellent opportunities for their spiritual development across a wide variety of lessons, for example considering how they would feel if they were in the trenches during the First World War. Pupils often discuss moral issues, for example eco-issues within science.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are so proud of their school that they would not consider behaving in any other manner. Sixth form pupils support younger pupils well.
- Behaviour around school and during breaks and lunchtimes is usually very civilised and orderly. However, the popularity of the food and limited space in the school's dining room result in congestion which can cause problems at times.
- The very positive attitudes in lessons are a significant reason why learning is so good. Well over 90% of the parents and carers who responded to Parent View felt the school makes sure pupils are well behaved. This is a far higher proportion than usually seen.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say they feel safe in school and also when they are outside school. This is also the view expressed in the great majority of responses to Parent View. All pupils have a clear understanding of how to respond safely to pedestrians who use the public footpaths running through the school.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the key issues of keeping safe, appropriate to their age. This includes aspects of sexual health and of substance abuse, including cigarettes and alcohol. All pupils have a very clear understanding of the risks when using the internet and also

the dangers of inappropriate use of social network sites. Pupils were able to explain the many issues, including the possibility of employers or universities seeing images which could affect future opportunities.

- Assemblies and personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons are used very well to explain a variety of risks to pupils and how they can avoid them. Important information on staying safe is made available to parents and carers through the school's website.
- Bullying incidents are rare and pupils say they feel confident that if reported they would be dealt with quickly. When incidents do occur they are often related to how a pupil looks or insulting another pupil's parent or carer. The school provides good support for both the victim and the bully. Pupils know about the different types of bullying, including issues around single-sex relationships. They are aware that staff challenge any pupil who makes inappropriate comments or uses expressions like 'gay' as a form of abuse.
- Heads of house and their deputies are highly supportive when pupils have issues or problems. The school's records show the very impressive impact of this support on pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. The school rigorously promotes equality of opportunity and tackles any discrimination.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The drive and ambition of the inspirational headteacher have been instrumental in maintaining the school's excellent achievement and provision. He, along with a highly effective senior leadership team, is constantly striving to improve. Virtually all staff who answered the staff questionnaire strongly agreed that they were proud to work at the school.
- Senior leaders have an accurate overview of the school's many strengths, including the quality of teaching, and also the few areas which need additional support to become outstanding. Staff who need additional support to improve their teaching are given support to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Joint working with other schools, colleges and universities within the Bath Education Trust has been effective in the school having a better overview of its strengths. Other schools within the Trust are frequent visitors to identify and share areas of excellence as well as to ensure consistency with judgments on the quality of teaching.
- The head of sixth form has a very good overview of how well pupils are achieving and the quality of teaching. The curriculum ensures pupils can achieve excellently at A level. The school ensures any pupil who did not gain a GCSE grade C or better in English language or mathematics before starting Year 12 can retake their GCSE. Results this year are well above the national rates.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. It is focused upon pupils studying GCSE courses that prepare them well for their next phase of education, training or work. There is an extremely large variety of clubs and sports which pupils enjoy. Sporting activities range from team sports to clay pigeon shooting. There is a well-established Combined Cadet Corps.
- Pupils' pride in the rich tradition of the school enhances their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments. The school has a choir and frequently stages productions. The last one was a very well-received version of the musical *Oliver*. Pupils readily identify charities and good causes to support.
- Pupils receive very good advice and guidance whenever they have to make choices about the next stage of their education. In Year 11 this includes advice on whether to continue at the school, study at a local college of further education or to seek employment. Very good advice and support are also given to Year 13 pupils when they are deciding if they want to go onto higher education or into employment. Pupils receive excellent support with their applications.
- Subject leadership is excellent. Middle leaders take responsibility for checking on the quality of teaching within their departments and have been successful in bringing about sustained improvements.
- The school uses information on its pupils well to check on how well they make progress so that

speedy interventions can be made if any pupil is identified as underachieving. Progress information is also used to inform the annual check on how well teachers are performing. Teachers have clear targets for improvement linked to their performance and those who successfully meet their targets are suitably rewarded. Arrangements for checking how effective support staff perform are not so well developed and the school is currently updating these.

- The school uses pupil premium money very well to close the gap between the achievement of eligible pupils and that of others. The gap is being very successfully narrowed at a far faster rate than nationally. The support for pupils with their reading, writing and mathematics in Year 7 has been extremely successful and similar success is seen with older pupils who have additional support for their literacy skills. The school recognises that the very many trips and visits may be expensive to families and consequently it uses funds other than the pupil premium to make sure no pupil misses out on an educational visit.
- The school is not complacent and is rightly self-critical of some areas. It already has plans to improve the dining facilities and facilities for sixth form self-study. It is constantly checking to make sure pupils are as safe as possible and has recognised the need to tighten some procedures when pupils are completing practical work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is highly effective in ensuring the school continues to improve and maintains its outstanding status. Governors have their own set of values which they use to check on how the school can be improved further. Governors are very well informed about the quality of teaching and achievement. They hold the school to account for its actions. Governors have a very well-informed overview of the examination results at both GCSE and A level, and while enjoying the very many successes are also focused on areas of relative weakness. They check on how well additional support is being used for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and for the use and impact of pupil premium funds. The governing body closely checks on how these groups are progressing compared to others within the school and nationally. Governors ensure only staff who meet the necessary requirements receive pay increases. Governors have very good systems to check that safeguarding systems in the school are as good as possible and fully meet statutory requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136520
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	441111

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,170
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	322
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charles Oldham
Headteacher	Andrew Davies
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01225 480466
Fax number	01225 480466
Email address	headmaster@beechencliff.org.uk

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Store St
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M1 2WD

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