

Beechen Cliff School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109332
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	363747
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
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	1,164
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	320
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Oldham
Headteacher	Mr A Davies
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 November 2007
School address	Alexandra Park Bath BA2 4RE
Telephone number	01225 480466
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 34 lessons and saw parts of other lessons and activities involving 37 teachers. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and representative groups of boys and sixth form students. The inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents, minutes of the governing body meetings, the work in exercise books and assessment data of selected year groups. They also scrutinised 111 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, as well as questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether the school sets high enough expectations and provides support for all groups of learners, particularly those who find learning harder, to ensure they achieve good or better outcomes.
- How well teachers use their knowledge about individuals to promote challenge, develop initiative and deepen critical thinking in lessons.
- How well the leaders at all levels work with other partners to secure greater understanding of the needs of students and their families, and how secure they are in evaluating success in this area of their work.
- Whether the improvement in sixth form provision is leading to better outcomes.

Information about the school

Beechen Cliff School is a large boys comprehensive school with a co-educational sixth form. It serves an advantaged area of Bath, and is oversubscribed. The proportion of boys known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Very few boys and sixth form students have a statement of special educational needs. Most of these have moderate learning and/or behavioural and emotional difficulties. Very nearly all boys and sixth form students are of White British backgrounds. Beechen Cliff was re-accredited with technology status in March 2008.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Beechen Cliff School provides an outstanding education for its boys and sixth form students, which reflects its values of high aspirations and success for all. Equal opportunity is promoted exceptionally well throughout the school, through an outstanding curriculum and high quality care, advice and guidance. This ensures the boys and sixth form students are able to access an extraordinarily wide range of opportunities to enhance their learning and personal development. Consequently, boys and sixth form students' outcomes in terms of their achievement and the wider aspects of their personal development are at least good; most are outstanding, including their attainment, which is high. The boys and sixth form students are very proud of their school and of each other. The capacity for further improvement is excellent due to the strong visionary leadership of the headteacher combined with the high calibre of the senior leaders and key governors, all of whom are strategic in their thinking. The school community shares this sense of purpose, works extremely well together and is very proud of its continuing success.

Teaching and learning are typically good. The most skilful teachers inspire and challenge the class; they use incisive questioning that drives the learning forward for both individuals and groups. The pace of lessons is infectious and participation in the lesson rapidly affects everybody. In these lessons, teachers use their knowledge of individuals' academic needs skilfully to tailor learning so that it fully meets the needs of all, ensuring that their progress is good or better. Such excellent practice is not yet embedded consistently across the school, and there are lessons where there is insufficient focus on the needs of different groups or how the teacher's expectations are managed. Self-evaluation is accurate. Thorough systems are in place to improve teaching further across the school through regular monitoring and focused professional development. The staff consider that they are supported well by senior leaders in their work, which contributes to securing high levels of staff stability and the excellent commitment within the school to develop middle leadership further. Senior leaders have a detailed knowledge of how different groups of learners perform and implement good strategies to support them.

The boys and sixth form students are known exceptionally well as individuals and challenged to give their best. Their needs are met through carefully targeted intervention and encouragement to make the most of the vast range of enrichment opportunities the school provides. The role models provided by older students through the house system ensure a harmonious and happy community where all can thrive. Their behaviour is nearly always good and they are excellent ambassadors for

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their school. They happily volunteer their time in helping to ensure the safety and well-being of others, not just at school but in the wider community. These experiences, combined with the high value the school gives to its partnerships, ensure the boys and sixth form students are extremely well prepared for their future economic well-being.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that learning is always at least good and all learners are challenged effectively, by:
 - ensuring that the learning objectives for different ability groups are well understood in all lessons
 - ensuring that lessons are briskly paced and challenging and engage everyone in learning at their level
 - ensuring that the effective strategies, used in the best lessons to encourage learners to think and learn independently, are extended to all teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Boys' achievement is outstanding: they make good progress from their above-average starting points in Year 7 to attain high standards at the end of Year 11. Boys' attainment of five or more higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics is a particular strength: a much higher proportion of boys attain this key measure than would be expected from their starting points in Year 7. A significant strength of the school is the way in which it identifies differing ability groups, thus enabling the most-able boys to gain the highest grades possible and yet successfully supporting those who find learning more challenging to achieve examination results of which they can be proud. Subject leaders, in conjunction with the heads of house, ensure that support in lessons or teaching time for small groups is carefully tailored to blend both the academic needs and social needs of boys. As a consequence, patterns of achievement, across the groups of boys that make up the school population, are very consistent. Particularly impressive is the high level of take-up for outdoor education and extra-curricular activity amongst those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The personal confidence and aspirations amongst these boys is high, their commitment to learning equally strong and, as a result, they also make good progress.

Boys are enthusiastic about school and learning, and their responses to the inspection questionnaire were largely positive. Most are confident and capable learners, and lessons enable them to gain new subject knowledge and understanding well. Boys generally have well-developed speaking and listening skills, and they collaborate very well together in pairs and groups.

In the large majority of lessons observed, boys make good progress and achieve well. They enjoy their learning greatly and for the most part, engage enthusiastically

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with the wide range of activities in lessons. For example, boys explained to an inspector how much the role play in an English lesson helped them get 'behind the issues' in *The Merchant of Venice*. The opportunities to discuss the contemporary issue of community inclusion were key factors in ensuring a high level of appreciation for Shakespeare as a social commentator. Self-discipline is a strong feature but in some lessons, their eagerness and enthusiasm to talk through views and ideas result in a few boys talking out of turn or not listening to each other. Good behaviour is clearly evident as the boys move around the school and interact with their friends, members of staff and visitors. Rewards and sanctions are clearly understood. However, in a few lessons, boys did not adhere to classroom codes of conduct and this was distracting for others. The school's specialist status and exceptional sporting opportunities make a significant contribution to the achievement of more vulnerable boys and their wider outcomes.

Boys enjoy coming to school. Attendance levels are above average and the rate of persistent absence and exclusion has fallen steadily. In part, this is because there are so many exciting activities for boys to participate in but also because they know they will get the support they require. Boys clearly feel safe. They report that there is very little anti-social behaviour and the vast majority of boys are confident that incidents are dealt with sensitively and promptly. Boys' attitudes towards leading healthy lifestyles are extremely positive. The take-up for the award-winning school dinners is impressive and the large majority join in after-school activities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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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How effective is the provision?

Relationships between teachers and boys are respectful and praise is used well to reinforce good work and behaviour. Teachers teach key subject knowledge and understanding rigorously and ensure that boys have a thorough understanding of examination requirements. In lessons, there is always time allocated for reflection and peer discussion, which is supported by reassurance from skilled staff. Teaching assistants are actively involved in planning the learning of the boys they support. The way in which the school tracks boys' achievement and the way in which teachers use assessment in their teaching have improved significantly since the last inspection. Boys say that they have a much clearer idea about their targets and how well they are doing. Although the teaching is good overall, there is some variability in how teachers assess boys' understanding during the lesson and emphasise what they need to do to improve.

Teaching in the less effective lessons typically has the following features: insecure planning that does not link the lesson's activities closely enough to its key objectives; a slow pace to the work; a lack of opportunities for developing student discussion and involvement and activities that are not sufficiently shaped to match different boys' capabilities and current attainment.

The all encompassing nature of the school is reflected in the outstanding manner in which it provides individualised programmes for gifted and talented boys and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's house system is a highly effective pastoral support system, with excellent links to external agencies. It ensures a coherent and integrated approach to the well-being of the boys, especially those facing more challenging circumstances. The academic tutoring programme plays a pivotal role in ensuring that, despite the school's size, every student is known as an individual and able to achieve well. Parents and carers of boys with particular needs are delighted with the support they receive. One parent explained that the additional support her son received 'improves his attitude as well as his overall enjoyment of school and learning'. Transition arrangements from primary schools are first class, the successes of which are confirmed by the boys themselves and by their parents and carers. The range and quality of personalised and individual programmes enable boys to make good progress academically, and exceptional progress in their personal development.

The range of academic qualifications, complemented by excellent extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities, is central to securing outstanding outcomes. The school's technology specialism is making an increasing contribution to ensuring topics are relevant through, for example, raising awareness of ecology and environmental stewardship.

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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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his senior staff are providing clear, determined and highly effective leadership. Governors provide valuable challenge and support; their evaluation and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses are well developed and thorough.

Tolerance and respect are promoted extremely well and any anti-social incidents are extremely rare. Improvements to the school's systems for target setting and achievement tracking are helping senior leaders to analyse and evaluate the performance of different groups more closely. Much good work has been done to develop the skills of middle leaders and to enable them to make a full contribution to the school's development since the last inspection. This group of leaders is increasingly effective.

The school safeguards its boys well, meeting all the current statutory requirements and providing good quality assurance systems and risk assessment checks. Drama, concerts, musical productions and annual prize giving are a few examples of ways in which parents and carers share in school life and enjoy positive relationships. The outstanding commitment to working in partnership with others is evident, not only through the promotion of the technology specialism with nearby primary schools, but in the extended links with other schools within the city. The school's wide-ranging approach has far-reaching effects beyond its own community. By visiting and helping to build a chapel for people in their linked township in South Africa, the boys gain valuable experience of different customs. The financial support offered to boys in order to participate in the impressive range of cultural visits and outdoor activities, such as the Centurion Challenge and the 3 Peak's, typifies the excellent commitment to everyone. As one student commented, such support ensures they 'don't stop believing'.

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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	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form provision is outstanding. Opportunities to study a very wide range of AS and A level courses are greatly broadened by partnership arrangements with two nearby schools. The recent curriculum innovations with the City of Bath college are ensuring learners from vulnerable groups gain access to an appropriate mix of academic and vocational skills. The students are extremely well advised about higher education, training and employment options. The excellent leadership centres around a deep understanding of the strengths of the provision and never stands still. As part of the whole-school 'learning to learn' curriculum, the sixth form extend their study skills through an extended project qualification. This is giving tremendous opportunity for students to have the very wide range of skills they achieve while at the school recognised.

Learning and progress are good and improving. There are clear indications from current data that academic achievement varies from good to outstanding. Systems for monitoring attendance have been an important factor in strengthening systems for tracking student and subject performance. The well-established practices for evaluating the performance of each department combine effectively with the school focus on using assessment data to ensure there is sufficient challenge provided for all students across all subjects. Retention rates are good, providing evidence of the students' enjoyment of the sixth form. Teaching and assessment are good overall, with much that is outstanding.

The students make an exceptional contribution to the school community and beyond.

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For example, they have a sustained involvement in a collaborative 'Interact' HIV/AIDS project in South Africa with a local school and other partners. They support younger students in a range of sporting and outdoor programmes and in their role as heads of house and learning mentors.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The numbers of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire was lower than average. The vast majority were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school and some positive endorsement by way of additional comments were received. The comment, 'Beechen Cliff expects a lot from parents but delivers a lot in return', was typical of the sentiments expressed. Very few responses raised concerns and these mainly focused on how effectively the school communicates with parents and carers. The school agreed to look further into the effectiveness of its e-portal system of communication.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Beechen Cliff 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 111 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1164 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	40	58	52	6	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	39	63	57	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	58	52	43	39	7	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	49	44	53	48	5	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	37	33	70	63	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	37	33	58	52	12	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	56	50	50	45	2	2	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)	46	41	54	49	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	48	43	55	50	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	46	51	46	3	3	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	32	51	46	13	12	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	59	53	49	44	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	67	60	40	36	2	2	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 all 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



18 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Beechen Cliff School, Bath BA2 4RE

On behalf of the inspection team, I am writing to tell you about our findings during the inspection. First of all, thank you for talking to us and being so helpful and courteous during our visit. We were very impressed by your extremely positive attitudes and good behaviour, and the extent to which you look after each other.

Your school is outstanding. The passion and commitment to ensuring you make a success of your time at Beechen Cliff is both extensive and inclusive. For the staff and governors, nothing is too much trouble and they go all the way to providing you with opportunities that will enrich and broaden your experiences while at school. Indeed, their commitment to your future is equally impressive. The school works harmoniously to set and achieve high aspirations for you all, and, as a result relationships and care and welfare are excellent. You are making good progress during your time at the school and reach high standards because of the good teaching combined with a first-rate curriculum. The breadth and quality of what is on offer is superb and is a key reason why you gain such outstanding outcomes in many other aspects of your personal development.

The staff and governors are ambitious for the future. As you are aware, they have already started on a project to secure an even greater understanding of your unique needs so they can continue to fine-tune the curriculum. We have asked that they focus even more on improving teaching so that all of you can make outstanding progress. In particular, we want them to include greater challenge in the questions they ask you in lessons, and to encourage you to think more deeply about how well you are learning. In the very best lessons, this really helps you learn well.

We thought the new-style house-tutor groups give you all a chance to make everyone's time in school a happy experience. We know you will enjoy making this a success.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector

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