

Beaminster School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113884
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325907
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	726
Sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Hile
Headteacher	Mike Best
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2005
School address	Newtown Beaminster DT8 3EP
Telephone number	01308 862633
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Beaminster School is a popular, smaller than average school serving the market town of Beaminster and a wide rural area of West Dorset. A very high proportion of students travel long distances to school and about a quarter come from outside the school's catchment area. The majority of students are of White British heritage and only a very few are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above the national average and the school has special provision for 32 pupils with moderate learning difficulties. About one third of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school has partnerships with other schools and colleges in West Dorset and Somerset in order to extend the range of courses on offer. The sixth form is managed jointly with Sir John Colfox School in Bridport.

The school has had specialist status in technology since 2001 and was redesignated in 2005. As a voluntary controlled school, there are strong links with the Church of England.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Beaminster School provides a good standard of education and has improved since the last inspection. Staff and students agree that 'everyone knows everyone' and this creates a very caring and safe community. Focusing on challenging targets and careful monitoring has improved the quality of teaching and learning, so it is now good. The majority of teachers understand how to use assessment to match work to students' needs and many do this effectively. As a result, achievement and standards are good, particularly in Years 7 to 9, with some students making outstanding progress in science and mathematics. Against the national trend, boys outperform girls in these subjects both at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. However, the gap in attainment in English between boys and girls is wider than that found nationally, although standards are still above the national average.

Students are well behaved and happy and care very much about their school. Although they have a school council, the opportunity for them to have a real influence is still limited. They are polite, friendly, cooperative and keen to learn, particularly if they are taught well and given responsibility. When they are given the opportunity to work independently, they thrive and really enjoy learning, but this does not happen in enough lessons and they rely too heavily on teacher direction. Improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection mean that there are regular changes to meet students' needs with a good range of opportunities for work-related learning through partnerships with other local schools and colleges. A substantial proportion of students are involved in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, particularly art and music, and their contribution to the local festival is valued very much by the community. Specialist technology status has enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) provision right across the curriculum. The vast majority of students complete a GCSE course in design technology and achieve results that are well above the national average.

Beaminster rightly prides itself on being an inclusive school. Detailed knowledge of the high proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) ensures that they are well cared for. The range of provision includes a welcoming student support centre and carefully planned support to tackle difficulties in literacy and mathematics. However, these students, including those in the learning base, are not always set challenging targets and their progress and provision throughout the whole curriculum is not always carefully coordinated and thoroughly monitored.

The school is well led and managed by the senior leadership team, who have steered forward the improvement in achievement in recent years. They have comprehensive systems in place for evaluating the school's work, but do not always use the information they collect to create focused and effective plans which will generate further improvement. Where middle leadership is strong, the impact on standards and achievement is obvious, for example in science, but this is not the case in all departments. Recent improvements in the progress students are making and in their attainment indicate that capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

When students first join the sixth form, their prior attainment is marginally below average. They make satisfactory progress, with results improving and broadly in line with national averages. Sometimes the academic courses offered are not suited to the students' varying

individual needs, and this limits their progress. Students enjoy good relationships with each other and with their teachers, who provide them with very effective one-to-one support. They are pleasant, polite and helpful and enjoy the atmosphere of the sixth form very much, but some find it difficult to take responsibility for their own learning. When they start in the sixth form, students lack the independent learning skills that will improve their motivation and success. Once they settle in, although much of the teaching is good, these skills are not adequately developed and so the pace of learning for some is slow. The curriculum is satisfactory and choice has been widened since the last inspection, although the sixth form partnership is not used sufficiently effectively to make choices even more varied, especially for those for whom an academic programme is unsuitable. Students are well guided and supported, and personalised but impartial advice helps them make appropriate choices for the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve opportunities both in and out of the classroom for students to take responsibility for their own learning and development.
- Ensure that the extensive monitoring and evaluation systems already in place are clearly linked to effective forward planning that improves students' achievement.
- Develop whole-school inclusive practice further by strengthening and coordinating provision so that it builds upon the work of departments and individuals.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their starting points. Standards in English have risen steadily over the last three years so they now match consistently high standards in mathematics and science. Boys' writing skills are not as good as those in reading by the end of Year 9, and this then affects their performance in subjects that rely on extended writing in GCSE. The school is already taking steps to tackle this issue. Overall, students make good progress in Years 10 and 11, with the percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, both with and without mathematics and English, fluctuating between being close to or above the national average in the last three years. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, in line with their peers.

In the sixth form, the 2007 A2 pass rates were in line with national averages and improved in 2008. In 2007, the AS results were below the national average, with a slight improvement in 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy coming to school for both the academic and social opportunities it gives them; this is demonstrated by the recent improvements in attendance, which is now good. Students and staff enjoy good relationships because they show respect for each other and, as a consequence, behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Where behaviour falls below the high expectations of the school, students are provided with support from the new Student Support and Guidance Centre and this has reduced the number of exclusions from school. While this number remains quite high for a school of this size, exclusion is used effectively for clearly defined reasons.

Despite being in a mainly mono-ethnic school, students' cultural awareness is good and incidents of racism are rare and dealt with effectively. Their social, moral and spiritual development is also good. For example, they interact easily with adults, have good attitudes towards bullying and participate in assemblies which reflect the broadly Christian ethos of the school. Sixth form students spoke eloquently of their spiritual responses to interesting scientific experiments and to reading poetry.

Students act in responsible and safe ways in practical lessons. They are aware of the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and many participate in the extensive extra-curricular sport opportunities. However, while the school provides a wide range of healthy meals, students do not always take advantage of them. Learners are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Many students make a very positive contribution to the school community. Around half the sixth form students make a regular commitment to support younger students develop their reading skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching in the main school is good, and it is satisfactory in the sixth form. The majority of teachers plan their lessons well and manage activities in a way that helps students to make good progress. Teaching assistants support the work of teachers very effectively, although the responsibility for matching support to students' differing abilities often rests on them, rather than on the teacher. Students receive good verbal feedback during lessons and there are examples of good practice, for example in history, where this is effectively underpinned with good written marking, enabling students to clearly understand what they have learnt, how they can improve and what they are aiming to achieve next. A recent focus on encouraging students to assess and make judgements about their own work has improved achievement. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they usually explain tasks well. Students behave well and respond to their teachers' clear expectations of their attitudes to learning. On the few occasions when students are encouraged to work independently, for example in PE, art and design technology, their performance improves, they take considered risks and enjoy what they are doing, but this practice is not consistent across subjects.

Sixth form students particularly value effective one-to-one support which enables them to make at least satisfactory progress in most lessons. Assessment is good and helps students improve their work further. Teachers consistently give good advice on how students could improve their performance, although this is not always reinforced in their marking of students' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The great majority of learners achieve well because the school provides a curriculum that is regularly adapted to meet students' changing needs. Vocational and work-related provision has been extended through the efficient use of federation and partnership programmes. The planned developments of new 14–19 diploma and a school-based BTEC provide further evidence of a responsive approach to local needs. Students say they particularly enjoy a thorough and

well-structured personal, social and citizen education programme. Careful monitoring of data has led to initiatives to improve literacy levels and the skills of younger students. Some of these measures, including steps to improve results in ICT, remain in the process of development. Students who are gifted and talented are well supported by the curriculum, but those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties need more opportunities to apply and extend their skills.

Despite its rural catchment area, which often makes transport difficult, the school promotes a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including drama, science-engineering and music clubs, with a good rate of participation, particularly in sports activities, although fewer Year 7 students are involved than other year groups. An activities week is used well to enhance the curriculum, providing, for example, a wide range of arts, science and sporting activities as well as trips locally and abroad.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

New students joining the school in Year 7 and those making the transition into Key Stage 4, the sixth form and onwards are well guided in their choices. Links with feeder primary schools are strong and benefit from the school's specialist status as a technology college. Parents are very positive about the smooth transfer process into Year 7.

Staff report regularly on progress and students value the pastoral support from their tutors, to the extent that they would like to see their contact time increased. A recently introduced academic monitoring day gives students the opportunity to discuss their progress with their parents and teaching staff. Sixth form students also value the very helpful support and guidance they are given.

The school meets current requirements for safeguarding children and arrangements for ensuring health and safety are suitable and sufficient. Systems for monitoring attendance and managing absence have improved and have resulted in increased attendance last year. Students who experience difficulties at school, for example with behaviour, attendance or medical issues, are effectively supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well managed and led by the headteacher and two very competent deputies. Challenging targets are used to encourage staff and learners and this has led to the rise in standards in recent years. Since the time of the last inspection, a more open and positive atmosphere has developed amongst the staff, who are anxious to improve their skills and share expertise with one another. A thorough system has been put in place to monitor teaching and learning, and over the last two years, this has had a positive impact on achievement and standards, particularly in Years 7 to 9. This improvement has been supported by effective departmental monitoring and action planning in subjects such as science, English and mathematics. However, these systems are not consistent across departments and leaders of foundation subjects vary in their confidence in using them to raise students' achievement. Whole-school self-evaluation is accurate but it is not always clear how this leads to effective future planning, implementation, review and further development because targets are not easily measurable and sometimes not directly linked to monitoring outcomes, nor closely allied with staff training and performance management systems.

Overall, leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. Within the school, the head of sixth form has a strong focus on the needs of individual students. Particular progress has been made in developing a safe, warm and supportive environment for students, where their progress is monitored regularly and they are given clear guidance on how to improve. The senior leadership team fully recognise the weakness in AS performance and in the effectiveness of the sixth form partnership.

Governors are supportive of the school, but do not always challenge the headteacher effectively.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Beaminster School, Beaminster DT8 3EP

You will remember when a team of inspectors came to your school recently. I would like to thank you for the way in which so many of you talked to us and told us what you thought about your school. In return, I would like to tell you about our findings. I hope that many of you will read the full report at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Beaminster is a good school and there have been many improvements since the last inspection. Achievement and standards are good, because the quality of teaching and learning is good. The curriculum is well matched to your needs and has improved in the last few years, especially through the school's specialist technology status. You are well looked after and teachers are generally good at telling you how well you are doing and what you need to do in order to improve. We found that you behave and attend well, and that the school is a safe and happy place in which to learn. The vast majority of you really enjoy school, both the learning and social opportunities it provides.

We have asked the headteacher and his team to make a number of improvements.

- We would like them to encourage you to take more responsibility for your own learning and to develop the skills to work independently. These skills are particularly useful when you move on into the sixth form or college. They also help you to enjoy your work more. You told us that although you have a school council, you do not always feel it is effective and you could be given more opportunities to contribute to improving your school, so we have asked them to improve this too.
- We have asked that all the data collected about how the school is doing are used to identify the most important areas for development, and then make sure they happen.
- We have asked that all the provision – teaching, curriculum and support – for students who have difficulties at school should be better coordinated so that everyone gets the best possible education and care.

I wish all of you the very best for the future.

Mary Massey HMI