

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Beechwood School
DCSF number: FOCUS number:	873/6034 405
Inspection team::	Reporting Inspector: Simon Bennett Supporting Inspector: Dr. Martin Bradley Lay Inspector: Douglas Siderfin
Dates of inspection:	6 - 9 May 2008

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Beechwood School

Address of the school: Shelford Bottom, Cambridge, CB22 3BF

Telephone number: 01223 400190

Fax number: 01223 400191

Proprietor: Beechwood Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Geoffrey Marsh

Name of Primary Manager: Bill Drake

Name of Senior Teacher: Keith Shurlock

Name of Senior Teacher (Primary): Franz Reinbold

DCSF number: 873/6034

FOCUS number: 405

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 7 - 18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 39 Girls: 21
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 1

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 8 Girls: 3

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:
Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Simon Bennett
Supporting Inspector: Dr. Martin Bradley
Lay Inspector: Douglas Siderfin

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 May 2008

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Beechwood School is now established in well ordered grounds in a carefully restored and partly newly built school building. It is registered as one school and has expanded to provide sixth form provision and primary classes. Additional plans are in hand to develop the facilities further. The school aims to enable all its pupils to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens, and in the process to fulfil the criteria of Every Child Matters.

Summary of main findings:

The school has gone a long way to fulfil its declared aims successfully. The school's emphasis on the personal, social and behavioural development of its pupils, reinforced through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and through Spiritual, Moral, Social and Culture development (SMSC), creates positive attitudes to work and to learning across the ability range. Pupils make good progress over time. The ethos of the school helps provide good models for pupils as they grow up and enables them to work in a social context. They learn to focus and to concentrate. They are learning computing as a life skill. The school philosophy encourages a sense of reward and recognition. It provides a favourable environment for learning and teaching. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and is almost always good. A high proportion of lessons were either outstanding or had outstanding elements. These were to be seen across the entire age range and in a wide range of subjects. The overall quality of the curriculum is good and enables pupils to make good progress. Work in Key Stage 2 is ongoing and has yet fully to take account of the relevant Focus materials. Pupils generally behave in an exemplary fashion and relate well to each other and to their teachers. The relationships are characterised by mutual respect. The school's physical environment offers space and variety and is exceptionally well cared for and maintained. Key resources for the encouragement of individual learning and research, such as the library, are at the heart of the school. The school has responded positively to recommendations made in previous reports. Pupils clearly enjoy their education as a consequence of the aforementioned factors and benefit from the exceptional concern showed for them by their teachers.

What the school does well:

- it provides an environment for teaching and learning of a high order;
- it allows for the successful development of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding; and
- it inspires very good behaviour and enjoyment by pupils.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- The school complies.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

- The school fully complies with the requirements of the DDA.

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure that there is an overview of Key Stage 2; and
- ensure that the planned transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is addressed in all schemes of work.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum is good and provides a sound foundation for teaching and learning, enabling the pupils to make good progress. However, the number of pupils in some age groups is small and the development of the Key Stage 2 work has still to address some major issues. The curriculum overall is broad and relevant, especially in the senior school. The introduction of Year 13 at the start of the present year was well planned, although the school is aware of some aspects which will be refined in 2008/9. Information and communication technology (ICT) was introduced during the autumn term 2007 and has been particularly effectively developed, with Year 7 pupils taking their first Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) examination during the week of the inspection. Throughout the senior school, ICT skills have been rapidly developed and the subject has a clear impact across the curriculum. The oldest pupils show a good range of computing skills. Care has been taken to ensure that pupils develop good typing skills before applying these to computer tasks: this has been particularly effective. Throughout the school, opportunities are taken to visit a wide variety of historical and cultural venues. Following their national tests, Year 9 pupils undertake a cross-curriculum week which includes orienteering, a historical visit to London, a visit to the German Europa Centre, cycling training by professional instructors who also train the Bedfordshire police, as well as school-based work involving activities such as basketball refereeing, sign language, making park benches and silk painting. This particularly good range of activities ends with Powerpoint presentations, to which all pupils can contribute and which are presented to the whole school and to relations.

In Key Stage 2, two development plans have been drawn up, one by the Primary Trustee and one by the Senior Teacher. These contain common elements, but some of the projected target dates for aspects of the curriculum have begun to slip slightly. At present there is no overview of the curriculum and not all subjects take full account of the Focus materials for the key stage. The curriculum as taught is broad and includes French, but medium and long term planning is not yet sufficiently linked to both the lessons taught and the development plan. The implications for the rest of the curriculum of introducing Latin in Years 5 and 6 have not been evaluated. The use of structured assessment to support planning is limited. Design and technology taught by a specialist teacher from the senior school is a useful development which extends the pupils' skills and knowledge. Similarly support from a mathematics teacher in the senior school usefully helps class teachers to provide more individual support for pupils.

In the senior school, planning varies in detail and format. The best planning provides different tasks to meet pupils' individual needs and evaluation is clearly organised. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 mirrors the National Curriculum, and all pupils have opportunities for cookery. Whilst not an issue during the present year, in September 2008 the majority of pupils in Year 7 will come from the primary school rather than from a wide range of other schools as in the past, and there is a need to ensure that planning in the two key stages is more closely linked.

In Key Stage 4, pupils are prepared for a wide range of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and other courses, including BTEC National courses, such as in Business Studies, and the International GCSE in Textiles. The school has

commendably sought to identify award-bearing courses for pupils of all abilities in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, including developing City and Guilds Building Studies and Business English. Technology courses in resistant materials and in textiles provide outstanding challenges for pupils. They rise to these challenges and their work is of extremely high quality. In the Sixth Form a good range of AS and A2 courses is provided, based on the needs of individual pupils. Courses include English, mathematics, accounts, economics, law, government and politics, French and business studies. OCR and BTEC courses are also offered. Careers guidance is satisfactory overall, with work experience at the ends of Years 10 and 11. However, this has yet to be fully coordinated across the curriculum for the full fourteen to nineteen age range.

PSHE is well developed throughout the school. It is closely linked to spiritual, moral and social development as a part of the school's ethos and underpins much of the school's approach to behaviour and learning. The shared values successfully promote the school's work.

There is good support for pupils identified as having additional learning needs and/or difficulties. Their progress is supported by careful assessments made by Focus staff, and the school implements Individual Learning Plans effectively, monitoring progress and adjusting support arrangements as necessary.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching observed was never less than satisfactory, mostly good and with a strong ingredient of outstanding lessons, either in part or as a whole. Such good practice was seen across a range of subjects, including English, textiles, resistant materials, ICT, history, geography, science and modern foreign languages (MFL). Relations between pupils and staff are based on mutual respect and conditions are creative, conducive to positive learning and consequent progress. Teaching is generally well planned and teachers display strong knowledge of their subjects. In Key Stage 2 the best teaching takes full account of the prior knowledge and capability of the pupils and this enables them to make good progress. There is a culture in the school of ongoing support for pupils' learning, and the school has successfully encouraged teachers to pursue Focus Learning Trust's initiatives on independent learning, allowing pupils space and opportunity to explore and pursue ideas for themselves with application and commitment. This was exemplified in their use of ICT and the library. Classrooms are orderly and supported with effective, vivid and subject-related displays. Occasionally, numbers in particular rooms inhibit opportunities to vary their approach to pupils and restrict them in giving specific guidance to the pupils on an individual basis. In the best lessons a variety of activities and approaches were adopted, lesson plans had been thought through and objectives clearly mapped out. Best practice helpfully showed teachers sharing these objectives with the pupils at the start of a lesson. This was done particularly effectively with Years 3 and 4. On other occasions a quick plenary at the end of lessons allowed teachers to go over key elements in the pupils' learning and to recapitulate and check the areas which pupils had absorbed and those that were more difficult. Good plans effectively carried out made clear links between the lesson itself, what had gone before and what was to come. Questioning was frequently of a high order and included careful differentiation to match the challenge to the potential of the pupils. Throughout the inspection, pupils' behaviour in class was exemplary, but this did not inhibit the spirit of enquiry. Good paired work was seen, and opportunities to discuss issues were readily taken. Pupils used the library and their computers to good effect. Overhead projectors were being used purposefully in science. Excellent use of video conferencing to Denmark was also witnessed. Pupils enjoy their lessons and make good progress over time.

Monitoring pupils' progress varies across the school. In the primary classes assessments are developing slowly as part of on-going work, especially in English and mathematics, but not yet having a clear overview. In the senior classes, assessment in some subjects, such as English and modern foreign languages, is firmly established. It is regular and uses internal and external testing and examination. In such cases, target setting and tracking is developing well and is clearly programmed throughout the year. Targets are referred to in the particularly useful reports which are made twice a year and which are supplemented by two interim assessments. The reports are informative documents, indicating overall achievement, and assessing effort in class work and homework and in conduct for all subjects. They also provide for more extended comments. Opportunities are given for pupils to offer their own comments, to set targets for their future work, and to suggest ways of improving the school. The quality of marking is inconsistent. In some subjects, such as English, French and resistant materials, it is detailed and helps pupils to understand how they can improve. In other subjects it is more cursory.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The facilitation of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be a strength of the school. The school is successful in raising levels of self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. The school enables pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the law. Pupils accept responsibility for their behaviour, display initiative and participate actively in the life of the community. Their spiritual development is underpinned by the ethos of the school and by their family life. They have a broad and expanding general knowledge of political institutions and services in England, and they display respect for their own and other cultures. They live in tolerance and harmony with each other. These strengths are corroborated and hardened by both the school's internal and external provision. Interesting ideas were explored in assembly and through PSHE and citizenship. Wide ranging references to current affairs are developed through history, geography, English and science among others. In a learning support lesson a fascinating discussion on the role of crossbenchers occurred and in history the latest developments in the American Primaries were considered. Music and art contribute to pupils' cultural development in a positive way. The school council is an active influence, and pupils take their responsibilities seriously. Initiatives such as paper collection in the senior school, emphasis on tidiness everywhere, the saving of water in the junior school, and excellent behaviour, all add to an atmosphere of friendly co-operation in learning. This internal provision is reinforced by a range of visits and activities, and the exercise of responsibility to the wider community through charity fund-raising, such as for the Macmillan Cancer Care and the East Anglian Air Ambulance. Visits to Prime Minister's question time and to Cadbury's World have been enjoyed by Years 12 and 13. Younger year groups have been on a geography field course to Epping Forest and have experienced immersion in German language at the Europa Centre. The visit to the Globe Theatre for a work shop and theatre tour was also much enjoyed. The pupils are well prepared for enjoying and achieving. Their economic well-being is cared for and they are encouraged to make their own contribution. The environment is well tended. Cooperation between staff, pupils and parents is of a high order. Staff are strongly committed to the learning of the pupils, and stay after school on a regular basis. The pupil's behaviour is exemplary.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school complies with all the regulations in these respects. Its management and its trustees have taken their responsibilities seriously. Due notice has been taken of Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance documents and those common policies produced by Focus Learning Trust. The school is well ordered and secure, and pupils go about their business in a safe and orderly fashion. The school is maintained immaculately and specific attention is given to all aspects of health and safety. The school has maintained contact with the local fire service and has asked for their guidance when appropriate. Sporting activities and recreation, car park navigation, access to the shop, food preparation, risk assessments, First-Aid and the registers are all kept to a high standard. The First-Aid policy is clear, and specific notices are placed in the foyer, indicating the names of the two trained first-aiders on duty on any particular day. The school is aware of the benefits of its well laid out and spacious grounds, but is also aware of the limitations on space in some of its classrooms. The accident book is well maintained, and additional space has been allowed to indicate who has been contacted in the case of an incident.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school now complies with regulatory requirements and has established a single, central spreadsheet, which covers all the requirements of the legislation. It has added a column to its original form to indicate whether appointees' qualifications have been certified as genuine. The school's administration is well aware of its duties in this regard and has made every effort to keep up with current regulations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school occupies premises in a small hamlet south of Cambridge. The main building consists of a well-adapted converted barn and cottage, linked by a newly built section. Other buildings and temporary classrooms include provision for design and technology, and storage. Overall, the premises are suitable for their current use and the school makes maximum use of them. Whilst some rooms are relatively small, especially those used by the primary classes and that for design technology resistant materials, they are adequate for present pupil numbers in each year group. There are specialist rooms for the library, science, cookery, textiles, resistant materials as well as a good-sized hall. There is a designated room for pupils who are unwell. There is a disabled toilet, although this is also used to store a television, restricting its use. A lift provides access to the first floor for pupils with disabilities. Cooked meals are provided on two days a week and are appreciated by the staff and pupils. Outside areas include a particularly

large grass field which is well used for a variety of games and sports. The school uses off-site facilities for some sports where marked-out pitches are available.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school has worked hard to meet and exceed the requirements. It provides twice-yearly full reports in an excellent format, twice-yearly interim reports and, in addition, a weekly bulletin to keep parents up-to-date with school news.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The Focus Learning Trust complaints procedure has been fully adopted and is followed with a file in place for any, should they arise. However, there have been no written complaints in the past twelve months.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

An atmosphere conducive to learning and growing into mature adults is quickly noticeable at Beechwood. There is suitable respect for authority at all levels and mutual appreciation of all members' input whether it be administrators, teachers or students.

Responsibilities are well defined and understood between the Chief Education Officer (CEO) and the senior school Head Teacher, who meet at least weekly for discussion. Both the CEO and the senior school Head Teacher show above-average ability to control and run the school, respectively - the latter having particular ability to co-ordinate the abilities of the staff with their full confidence.

At the regular and well-minuted trustee meetings it would be to further advantage for the minutes to include a follow-up procedure, indicating by whom and when the decision reached will be implemented. This would give confidence that all matters are in hand.

The relationship between the senior and primary departments needs clarifying in order to conform with legal requirements of one school, to coordinate further the addition of Years 1 and 2, and to assist in the transition to the senior school.

The buildings on site have been transformed into a beautiful school, making excellent use of the space available, complete with aesthetically selected trimmings. However, actual individual rooms are in short supply and in some classrooms space is tight. It is understood that trustees are investigating with planners the possibility of an additional separate block to house the primary school. This would ease the whole situation, especially bearing in mind the probable increase in numbers in the near future.

The trustees are successfully managing the finances of the school.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The relationship between the senior and primary departments needs clarification in order to conform with the legal requirements of registration as a single school.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the Focus Learning Trust website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk