

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
DfE number: FOCUS number:	873/6034 405
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Simon Bennett Cecile Corfield Lay Inspector: David Kilbey
Dates of inspection:	10 th – 12 th May 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Beechwood School	
Address of school:	Shelford Bottom, Cambridge, CB22 3BF	
Telephone number:	01223 400190	
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Email address:	beechwood.admin@focuslearningorg.com	
Proprietor:	Beechwood Education Trust	
Name of Chief Executive Officers:	Mr Cedric Fentiman Mr Christopher Norman	
Name of Senior Teacher:	Mr Keith Shurlock	
DfE 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: 40	Girls: 34
Number of post-16 students:	Boys 10	Girls: 7
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs:	Boys: 1	Girls: 0
Annual fees:	No fees charged	
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002	
Inspection Team:		
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Mike Thirkell	
Supporting Inspectors:	Mr Simon Bennett Mrs Cecile Corfield	
Lay Inspector:	Mr David Kilbey	
Dates of inspection:	10 th – 12 th May 2011	

SECTION 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 Education (DfE). 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 a school of special religious character situated in a quiet location on the outskirts of Cambridge. It is run by the Beechwood Education Trust, which was initially established in 1994 to provide support for Christian parents who were at the time educating their children at home. The school does not select pupils on the basis of academic ability and now provides education for 74 boys and girls between the ages of seven and eighteen. Pupils who attend the school are from Cambridge and the surrounding area and from Thaxted and Stamford. The school has been located in its present premises since September 2006. In September 2007 the accommodation was increased to make provision for pupils between the ages of seven and eleven. There is currently one pupil who has a statement of special educational needs and the school identifies a further seventeen as having varying degrees of learning difficulty. The school aims *'to enable all its pupils to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens'*. It was last inspected by the School Inspection Service in 2008.

Summary of main findings:

Beechwood School provides a good quality of education for pupils of all ages and abilities. The quality of the curriculum and teaching is good and a significant number of the lessons observed throughout the school were of outstanding quality. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, which supports the development of a positive learning atmosphere in classrooms and which encourage pupils to play an active role in their learning. Pupils of all abilities make good progress, demonstrated by the good results achieved in public examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils acknowledge the support that they receive from their teachers. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The school's provision for their spiritual and moral development in particular reflects the Christian ethos of the school. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils say that they are well cared for and that they recognise the support provided by their teachers. All requirements relating to their welfare and safeguarding are understood by the school and are in place. Trustees give high priority to all matters relating to health and safety and the maintenance of premises and accommodation. The trustees recognise the support that the school has received from staff during a recent period of uncertainty. The school has made further progress since the last inspection guided by effective management and the support of its community. The high quality of the learning environment provided by its buildings and premises is a

significant support to learning and the development of the calm working atmosphere which typifies the school. The quality of subject schemes in the secondary department requires more consistent reflection of the teaching of the individual subjects and further identification of their contribution to other aspects of the curriculum such as personal, social and health education (PSHE) and careers education. The school meets all the requirements for registration as an independent school.

What the school does well:

- its provision of practical, aesthetic and creative education is of high quality;
- its pupils behave in an exemplary fashion throughout the school and they invariably show positive attitudes to learning; and
- it ensures that the high quality of pupils' learning experiences overall and the progress they make provide a firm basis for their future economic and personal well-being.

Next Steps:

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

- develop further the assessment systems for tracking pupils' progress in the primary department, and complete the development of documentation to support pupils' transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3; and
- develop a marking policy specific to the individual needs of the school which supports a more consistent approach to marking and written feedback to pupils relative to their abilities and ages.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good in both the primary and secondary departments of the school. The provision meets the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities effectively, including those identified as having special learning needs. This reflects the school's core aims of providing all pupils with access to all subjects of the curriculum in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and to tailor the curriculum to meet the individual learning needs and aspirations of students in Years 12 and 13. It provides pupils of all ages with good opportunities to develop skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. Planning throughout the school is based on guidance from the Focus Learning Trust, supplemented as appropriate by schemes of work.

Curricular provision in the primary department is good and enables pupils to make good progress. A two-year cycle of curriculum subjects ensures that the pupils in the mixed-age classes do not repeat concepts already taught. Lesson planning provides clear details of how work is matched to the age and ability of the pupils. Pupils are given many opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups, enabling them to share ideas and support one another. Literacy and numeracy form the core of the curriculum and lessons take place each morning. Specialist teaching is provided in French, music and physical education (PE). PE takes place twice a week and includes a wide range of sports over the school year; for example swimming lessons take place in the summer term. In 'Golden Time' pupils can choose from a range of activities awarded for their good behaviour and efforts. The curriculum is enhanced with a good range of educational visits to support learning.

The curriculum for pupils of secondary age is set out in a curriculum policy and schemes of work are provided for all subjects. However, the schemes of work vary in quality and sometimes do not reflect the high quality of teaching and the strategies used by teachers. The school development plan recognises the need to review and improve schemes of work. The issue for development identified by the last inspection report relating to providing schemes of work to support pupils' transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 has still to be addressed.

In Key Stage 3 the curriculum contains all National Curriculum subjects, including music, with the addition of Bible Studies. It includes both geography and history. Good opportunities are available for pupils to take a wide range of GCSE subjects in Key Stage 4. A range of examination boards are used at this level, for example IGCSE in design and technology (DT) and history and an international GCE O level examination in textiles as well as the range of GCSE courses, emphasising the school's aim of ensuring that courses meet pupils' learning needs. In the sixth form pupils have access to a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects provided by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and City & Guilds as well as AS-level and A2-level examinations. Emphasis is placed on providing a range of courses that meet pupils' individual needs and aspirations. Provision for modern foreign languages is very good throughout the school. Pupils begin French in Year 3 in the primary department and from Year 8 all pupils take both French and German with the exception of a minority of pupils who drop a

modern language to receive support for special learning needs. Those pupils who are not successful in achieving a GCSE pass at the end of Key Stage 4 are able to continue to study the language through the recently introduced French Asset course in Year 12. The quality and range of provision for pupils' practical, creative and aesthetic development are very good throughout the school. The positive use made of computers, including those in the library in the secondary department, emphasises the school's strong commitment to developing pupils' independent learning skills. The use of computers is in the process of development in the primary department.

Suitable provision is made for PSHE and citizenship at all stages. The current affairs course provides effective and stimulating opportunities for pupils to pursue their studies of topics of current interest and concern, such as the alternative vote. Rich opportunities are provided for pupils' physical development through use of the school's own sports grounds, further enhanced by the use of visits to various local sports facilities. Provision for careers education is suitable and provision for work experience in Key Stage 4 is good. The range of businesses within the school's community is used effectively to support such placements. However, the school has not yet mapped how the provision of aspects of PSHE and careers is supported throughout the curriculum. As a result of the wide range of learning opportunities experienced by pupils they are well prepared for the experiences and responsibilities of adult life. There has been good provision for enriching the curriculum and extra-curricular activities through visits and other activities, although the school acknowledges, and pupils and some parents observe, that there has been a lull in these activities recently.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is excellent. The experienced special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has a thorough knowledge of the required support procedures which are carried out conscientiously. The trustee for special educational needs liaises with the SENCO regularly and they provide an effective partnership. The school's monitoring and assessment strategies are used to identify any pupil experiencing difficulties. Specialist and class teachers work closely together to provide in class support or suitable withdrawal strategies. Each identified pupil has an individual education plan with clear targets to guide their support and progress which are reviewed regularly. Procedures and requirements relating to the single statement of special educational needs are fulfilled. Assessment is additionally used to identify pupils who are able, gifted and talented. These pupils are provided with appropriate extension work to further promote their progress. School records indicate that these strategies are proving successful in this.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is good throughout the school. A significantly high proportion of teaching is of outstanding quality. Teachers demonstrate good communication skills and confidence in their subject knowledge. The consistently good quality of teaching is a significant factor in supporting the good progress made by pupils of all abilities, including those with special learning needs, as they move through the school. Their progress is confirmed by their high achievements in the most recently published results in public examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. Teachers show good classroom management skills and develop positive working relationships with their pupils relative to their ages and stages of learning. Behaviour and response are invariably positive in lessons. The quality of teaching in general and the good relationships between teachers and their pupils benefit from the small size of classes in the secondary department and the

opportunities that this provides for teachers to ensure that pupils of all abilities in a class are engaged in the learning activity. In the primary department teachers provide many interesting activities in each subject to engage pupils' interest and to keep them on task. Pupils have opportunities to carry out investigations in science and to express their ideas in subjects across the curriculum. Teachers and pupils are supported effectively by classroom support assistants who play an important part in the department's provision.

Pupils of secondary age appreciate the support that teachers provide to help them achieve their potential. Boys and girls show positive attitudes to learning and respond readily to questions and challenges set by their teachers. This reflects the success of the school's aim of encouraging pupils to develop the ability to work independently and to take responsibility for their own work. Teachers generally plan and structure their lessons well, which ensures that they proceed at a good pace. Lessons build effectively on previous learning, which supports pupils to develop progressively new skills and understanding. In practice, teaching responds well to the learning needs of individual pupils in classes, although written lesson plans do not always reflect this.

Dialogue and interaction with their teachers, and where appropriate with one another, are strong features of the learning experience of pupils. Questioning is used as an effective tool to challenge the most able to use previous learning to deduce answers and to encourage less confident members of a class to respond through sensitive guidance. In the secondary department teaching styles reflect the age of pupils and the level or nature of study; for example, an A-level history class was conducted in a mature, seminar-style atmosphere and in a GCSE DT class pupils discussed with the teacher, as part of their examination revision, how appropriate procedures, tools and processes would be used to achieve a required result. Creative work in general in the secondary department encourages the development of imagination and of aesthetic judgements. In art, Year 8 pupils' introduction to abstract images using pastels and other media demonstrated high levels of sensitivity to tone and colour and above all trust in the guidance provided by their teacher. High levels of subject knowledge and enthusiasm are key factors shown by teachers in the most effective lessons, which draw pupils into learning. There is a suitable range of resources available to support all aspects of teaching and learning throughout the school.

A framework for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress has been prepared appropriately, although some aspects are still under development in the primary department. Pupils are tested soon after joining the school to determine their individual learning needs. Assessment procedures are good overall in the primary department. A range of assessments are undertaken regularly and provide teachers with valuable information on which to base their planning for lessons. The schedule for assessment follows carefully the guidance provided by the Focus Learning Trust. A new marking system has been introduced which pupils state is easy to understand and informs them of their progress. Pupils' work books are marked regularly and conscientiously. A tracking system to record assessments over time is under development. In the secondary department data derived from assessment is used effectively to set learning targets for pupils. Further assessments, including Key Stage 3 national tests, are carried out throughout the school on a regular basis. The information and data derived are provided to teachers to inform their planning and to alert them to occasions when a pupil's attainment falls below expectation. Pupils throughout the school express a clear view of their progress. Information collected

enables the school to monitor the outcomes of secondary pupils' work and to track their progress in relation to their potential as indicated by their achievements in lessons and tests, which are set regularly. This data is an important tool in ensuring that all pupils make progress in relation to their abilities. The effective use of the information available through monitoring is supported by the good opportunities for dialogue between teachers and their pupils made possible through small class sizes. Such opportunities are supported by regular reports and meetings with parents to review their children's progress. The quality of reports to parents is good. The school relies heavily on the Focus Learning Trust policies for both assessment and marking. Although teachers create good opportunities to speak with pupils about their work, the marking of secondary pupils' exercise books is occasionally inconsistent in quality, and written feedback does not always provide guidance on what needs to be done to improve further.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' spiritual development is based on the Christian principles evident in their lives, founded on both home and school. This is powerfully shown in the strong sense of community in their daily lives at school, their relationships with each other, with staff and trustees. They prosper further as a result of the wholehearted commitment of staff to their academic and personal well-being and progress. The school continues to be successful in fostering pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils demonstrate that they are able to distinguish right from wrong and this is reinforced through their relationships with one another, and through their response in lessons and assemblies. Pupils' behaviour at all levels is exemplary, and they are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves as individuals and for others. Attendance is good. Pupils say that bullying is rare and are confident that the strategies used by the school to deal with any instances should they occur are rigorous and that parents are kept informed and involved.

Pupils display a very well developed understanding of political institutions and topical developments, and are encouraged through assemblies and the curriculum to explore these further. Discussions in citizenship, English, history and a range of other subjects reinforce and support these activities, which are supported by the use of excellent displays round the school, a wide range of visits and trips at home and abroad, and visits to the school by representatives of the public services. Issues surrounding the alternative vote were under close scrutiny in classes, assemblies and discussion and through displays. The range of enrichment activities available has been extensive, although this has recently been curtailed due to specific circumstances. Secondary pupils say that they look forward to the range of activities, visits, experiences and visitors to the school afforded by the annual cross-curricular week.

Pupils are supportive of one another. For example, an excellent assembly on high speed train links presented by a sixth form pupil was listened to intently, received enthusiastically and prompted interesting discussion later on in the day in a current affairs class. Cultural development of a high standard is evident in work in art and music, both at an individual and group level. Pupils develop a sound knowledge of

other cultures through the curriculum showing, for example, clear understanding of the impact of intolerance through the effects of war in history. This and other opportunities throughout the curriculum and enrichment activities emphasise the importance of learning to live in harmony with others. Charities are well supported and knowledge of various organisations extends pupils' understanding, whether through the book aid scheme, supporting mobile camel libraries, or the work of the Red Cross. The school council is active, and pupils enjoy such responsibilities, whether setting up and organising the end of term concert, preparing the well-received weekly news bulletin, or fulfilling duties relevant to equipment and storage. In the primary department pupils readily accept a range of responsibilities, such as register monitors, collecting the daily fruit from the kitchen and keeping the stationery table tidy. Teachers maintain rotas for these tasks to ensure that all pupils have the experience of taking responsibility. In conversation with inspectors secondary pupils showed a mature understanding of the issues facing their younger friends and the ways in which problems could be addressed. This sense of an active and mutually supportive community is emphasised in the strong and caring administrative commitment evident on a daily basis.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school's provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. All policies and procedures to ensure the pupils' welfare are established and meet regulations in all respects, including those relating to anti-bullying and safeguarding. Trustees and staff take their responsibilities seriously in this area. Risk assessments are carried out rigorously and conscientiously. All of the required documentation, including with respect to child-protection is in place, supported by guidance from the Focus Learning Trust, and are implemented effectively. Fire risk assessments and checks on fire fighting equipment are thorough. Fire drills take place each term and details are logged appropriately. Before the pupils go on out of school visits, all required checks and assessments are carried out appropriately. The school has two qualified first aiders and there are many first aid kits around the school, the contents of which are checked regularly. All accidents are recorded correctly. Pupils are well supervised at break and lunchtimes.

Staff keep a close watch on the pupils' day-to-day welfare. Pupils say that they know who to turn to if they have any problems. The school keeps a record of any instances of misbehaviour. The behaviour management policy provides staff with clear guidelines of rewards and sanctions. Class rules are displayed in the primary department and expectations relating to behaviour are made clear throughout the school. Pupils say that they recognise the importance of these rules to ensure their well-being and the regular functioning of the school community. Appropriate systems for recording sanctions are in place.

The school encourages the pupils to develop healthy lifestyles through assemblies, PSHE and science. Primary pupils have fruit each morning and enjoy taking exercise before morning and afternoon sessions. The importance of exercise is emphasised throughout the school and appropriate time is allocated to PE. Pupils in the secondary department recognise the wide range of sports and physical activities afforded by the school facilities, enhanced by visits to various local sports facilities.

Safe practices such as the correct way to walk on the stairs and in the corridors are maintained. The admission and attendance registers are kept in accordance with regulations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school undertakes all the required checks on staff and others associated with the school. An appropriate record of all of the checks undertaken is kept in a register as required.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

All regulations relevant to premises and accommodation are met. The trustees have continued to exercise thorough diligence in the maintenance and development of the site. The school buildings form a pleasant, stimulating and functional environment in which the pupils are educated effectively. Classrooms are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the year groups, both in the secondary and primary departments. Classrooms have been designed to be flexible through the use of removable partitions. Temporary classrooms added since the last inspection provide suitable environments for learning, although the school intends to replace them with more permanent buildings when circumstances allow.

The school is well resourced with computers and equipment for video conferencing which are used to provide links with a school in Copenhagen. The library, which is strategically placed at the centre of the school, is well equipped with computers and the book stock is in the process of renewal. Displays enhance and celebrate learning throughout the school, and benefit from thoughtful and sensitive coordination.

The school is well maintained and decorated, and the provision for pupils who are ill is of high quality. The assembly hall, which is used for a wide range of purposes, is functional and capacious and full of interest and character. The school uses offsite facilities to support a wide range of sporting activities to augment its own extensive outside play areas, which include a cricket pitch. The facilities for cookery are maintained in excellent and hygienic condition and provide a valuable aspect of pupils' learning opportunities. The DT building has been successfully extended since the last inspection, thus enabling larger classes to be accommodated. The whole site is a testimony to the collaborative efforts of the school community, trustees, parents and staff alike, and is respected and appreciated by the pupils. Minor issues which arise relevant to maintenance are dealt with immediately, as was the case with a very small number of issues reported to the school during the inspection. Matters raised at the last inspection have been thoroughly dealt with.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The school gives all the required information to parents including details of the curriculum provided, provision for the welfare and safeguarding of pupils, and details of the child protection policy. The prospectus offers an appropriate range of information, supported by other documentation which is readily available on request, through circulars or through the regular newsletter which is prepared by sixth form students. Full particulars of those responsible for the management of the school are given as required. Reports to parents are sent on four occasions during the school year, through two full subject reports and two interim reports. Communication with parents is supported effectively by the pupils' school diary. Parents have two formal opportunities to meet with their children's teachers in each academic year. The school understands the importance of informing parents about its provision for special learning needs and the requirement to make suitable reports to local authorities where necessary.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The procedures for handling complaints follow the guidance from the Focus Learning Trust. They are clear and are provided appropriately to parents.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

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

Beechwood Education Trust was formed in 1994 to provide assistance for the education of children of Christian parents and now administers Beechwood School. The Trust is forward looking and constantly seeking to improve the provision it makes both through the facilities of the school and the educational opportunities provided. The school also has developed successful links with study centres in Copenhagen, and Haus des Lernens in Hamburg.

Clear documentation clarifies the Trust's structure and the responsibilities carried by each Trustee, together with those to whom duties are delegated, and all eight Trustees show diligence and energy in the execution of their responsibilities. To support ease of working the Trustees divide themselves into an internal team and an external team, according to the nature of their work and to ensure that all necessary areas of responsibility are covered. There has recently been a change of Chief Education Officer (CEO), the former retiring after serving very ably for nearly five years. He has been replaced by a CEO team of two Trustees. There is scope for the appointment of a further Trustee to ease the load and the Trust Deed has recently been amended to allow this. The Trustees are particularly concerned that all involved in the running of the school should be fully involved and able to commit sufficient time to ensure that no aspect of the work suffers from neglect. From next term the school day will commence three-quarter of an hour earlier. This means an earlier start for children, but they will benefit by an ease in travelling due to less traffic. At present, a bus is used to transport the Stamford group, but new arrangements are in hand for next term. It is proposed to widen the drive within the gates of the school to provide additional parking. There have been some adverse comments about the earlier start but it brings the school into line with most other Focus Learning Trust schools.

The school has passed through a testing time over the past eighteen months through a number of factors, but the appointment of a new head of the primary department and generous promises of funding have done much to inspire fresh confidence, and the Trustees are buoyant and optimistic. The Trustees' relationship with the Head Teacher is open and communicative. This has enabled him to support his staff in a similar way, with a consequently beneficial impact on the school community.

Management meetings for operational decisions are held between the two CEOs and the head teacher each Wednesday morning. Also about to convene is a senior management team comprising the two CEOs, the primary manager, the SEN Trustee and the SENCO, together with the head teacher and senior teacher of the primary department. This committee will discuss staffing, curriculum, sharing of ideas and co-ordination. Decisions taken will be disseminated to the school through the head teacher, and through the CEOs to other Trustees. Communication within the school is good. The head teacher holds a pre-school briefing each Monday with his staff and the information is conveyed to any part-time staff not present.

There is a culture of awareness throughout the school of the dangers attending the use of computers, and protective measures are taken to ensure pupils' and students'

cyber safety. Pastoral care is attended to by the Trustee responsible for supervision, which he ensures is implemented at lunchtimes and break times. Teachers have commented favourably on the care taken of every pupil. Of special note is the effective scheme set out by the Bible Studies co-ordinator to ensure that the subject is taught methodically and supportively. Throughout the school, Bible Studies is the first lesson on Monday morning. Each tutor is presented with his lesson topic about ten days in advance and gives a report of the lesson back to the co-ordinator, with an appropriate score for the year group taught. A trip is arranged each half term for the year group with the highest marks.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The Trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestion as to where specific improvement could be made:

- ensure that all policies are personalised to the school and signed, and that they are consistently adopted.

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 School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk