

Beacon Academy

North Beeches Road, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 2AS

Inspection dates

21–22 March 2017

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's drive, ambition and resilience are successfully harnessing the potential for excellence within the school.
- The headteacher enjoys strong support from parents, pupils and staff alike. Staff are dedicated to doing their very best for the pupils in their care.
- Expertly guided by the headteacher, senior leaders make an outstanding contribution to moving the school forward.
- Across the school, leaders and teachers contribute to, and benefit from, high levels of accountability. Leaders and teachers are extremely self-critical and constantly seek to develop their practice.
- Pupils' progress towards appropriately challenging targets is very closely tracked. Teachers provide timely and well-focused support for the small number whose progress is slower. Leaders carefully monitor the impact of this support.
- Leaders at all levels ensure that guidance and training for teachers are effective. As a consequence, teaching is mostly strong, and some practice is highly effective. Most pockets of weaker practice are improving. However, some improvements are working better than others.
- Pupils make strong progress from their starting points. Differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are generally diminishing.
- Pupils make significantly above-average progress in mathematics and achieve highly in a range of practical and academic subjects.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well in class and around the school. They relish the opportunities the school provides.
- Safeguarding is strong and effective. Pupils are acutely aware of the impact of their language and actions on others' sense of well-being.
- Governors (trustees) robustly check that improvements benefit all pupils, both academically and pastorally, and that the school performs well compared to others nationally.
- Students' progress on 16 to 19 study programmes is improving, following effective changes to leadership, the content of study programmes and developments in teaching.
- The school has many strengths but it is not outstanding. Some well-focused, newer initiatives are not yet having a consistent impact across all groups of pupils and subjects, including in the sixth form.
- In a small number of classes, expectations of disadvantaged pupils, especially most-able disadvantaged pupils, are not yet high enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that all practice is as effective as the best in the school by ensuring that:
 - disadvantaged pupils and the most able fulfil their potential
 - the very strong practice seen in some subjects in the sixth form is developed across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher's leadership is highly effective. Since taking up the role, she has resolutely and determinedly made changes that have moved the school forward, setting out her goals and very high expectations with clarity and conviction. As a result, she enjoys exceptional support from staff and pupils. Comments such as, 'I have never worked in such a humane, ambitious and inspirational school' were not uncommon in the staff survey. Her very high standards and strong ambition enable the school to fulfil its mission of continuous improvement.
- The headteacher has developed the senior leadership team tremendously well. Senior leaders, especially the deputy headteacher, make a very effective contribution to the school because they set high standards for themselves and others. They rightly employ these standards when holding middle leaders to account for the progress and outcomes of individual pupils.
- Leaders expertly support pupils in making the right choices. Consequently, pupils' conduct and approach to learning are exceptional. Pupils relish the opportunities the school provides, showing strong leadership by taking the initiative on a range of well-thought-out projects.
- Senior leaders, working alongside subject leaders and lead practitioners, have taken effective action to improve teaching. They wisely focus on areas where pupils' progress is less strong but maintain a watching brief on all areas.
- Leaders with impressive subject expertise are contributing well to improvements in pupils' learning in science, English and literacy. However, some potentially effective new approaches are still in their infancy.
- The school contributes effectively to system-wide improvements. In recognition of the school's impressive curriculum design and implementation, leaders provide training across the authority on benchmarking the curriculum against key indicators. In addition, the school has taken a leading role in establishing robust peer reviews of subjects and aspects of provision.
- Leaders have created a culture in which teachers feel highly accountable for ensuring that the pupils they teach do well. Fair and robust approaches to managing teachers' performance play a key role in this, as do subject leaders and heads of year. They successfully ensure that information about pupils' progress towards challenging targets is used swiftly to identify those who are falling behind. Leaders also diligently check whether actions taken to enable pupils to catch up are working well enough.
- Leaders' recent changes to the curriculum have been scrupulously planned and robustly evaluated. The current curriculum is highly aspirational and enables pupils to achieve high levels of competence across a range of academic and practical subjects. Pupils have free rein when choosing their GCSE options, enabling them to pursue their interests and passions as well as gain a strong academic grounding.
- Leaders are ensuring that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. They are highly analytical about how much difference additional funding makes, commissioning an external review, which has rubber stamped their practice.

However, leaders have made a number of further changes based on recommendations, which are in their early days and so they are not yet having a consistent impact.

- Leaders have effectively threaded spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) learning through the curriculum, carefully charting where opportunities to reinforce messages fit best. As a consequence, pupils fully experience all elements of SMSC learning, including spiritual learning, which is provided through talks and assemblies given by faith groups. British values are very well promoted, especially tolerance, through the active school council, pupil leadership roles and pupil groups that promote equality.
- The new special educational needs coordinator has made changes to the provision which are working well. Pupils who have additional needs are well catered for. In-class and extra support is carefully planned and monitored. Consequently, the school has greatly reduced the proportion of pupils who are educated off-site.
- The school has focused on providing effective help for Year 7 pupils who have gaps in their learning. To this end, a teacher who has primary experience has sensibly been very recently appointed. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the new teacher on current pupils but early indications are positive. In 2016, Year 7 pupils eligible for catch-up funding made strong progress in English and very strong progress in mathematics.

Governance of the school

- Governors (trustees) make an effective contribution to the school because they apply high expectations when evaluating teachers' impact on pupils' learning and progress. Governors also have high standards when scrutinising pupils' performance, sensibly making comparisons with national data. They rigorously check the school's own information on pupils' current progress and are robust when asking leaders to account for any variations between different subjects and different groups.
- There is extensive educational and financial expertise on the governing body, which governors put to good use when checking that pupil premium funding is having a strong enough impact on pupils' achievement. Governors rightly insist that changes to the curriculum benefit all pupils. They make well-planned visits to the school to assure themselves that this is the case, as well as to make spot checks on safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding leaders ensure that systems and procedures operate very well. The high standards that are applied in monitoring and evaluating other aspects of the school are also directed at safeguarding. Leaders are supremely diligent and use their specialist training effectively. Leaders refer pupils to external agencies in an appropriate and timely manner and closely check the progress of any referrals.
- The school works very well with young people and their families to ensure that their needs are met within school. In addition, pupils are strong advocates for fairness, delivering assemblies and participating in activities designed to reinforce a sense of tolerance and justice. Pupils' feelings of empathy and care are underpinned by their strong understanding of how to stay safe when online and minimise other risks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is mostly good, and where it is not, it is improving. Some practice is very effective. Nevertheless, teaching, learning and assessment are not yet outstanding because, despite positive changes, there are some areas where teaching is not improving as rapidly as in others. These are most notably in science, and some aspects of English.
- Teaching is particularly strong in mathematics due to strong subject leadership and this has led to pupils having positive outcomes over time. In particular, teachers confidently set tasks that require pupils to consider different methods, apply mathematical reasoning skills and devise ways of testing out theories.
- Pupils are taught effectively in history. As a consequence, they are able to evaluate the significance of evidence and speculate about the impact of historically momentous events. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to ask searching questions, which effectively prepare pupils for examinations.
- In dance and drama, skilled teaching means pupils successfully develop their performance skills and gain the techniques they need to express themselves through words and movement. For example, in drama, pupils convincingly represented characters from Shakespeare's play 'The Tempest', using a range of physical characterisation methods.
- Following some weaker historical teaching in science, the subject leader has made a number of well-planned changes that are leading to some improvements. A number of approaches are in their infancy and are therefore having a greater impact in some classes than in others. For example, pupils are rightly developing their scientific vocabulary. However, some pupils do not have a deep-rooted enough understanding of the concepts and theories being described by the words they learn.
- Teaching in English is also improving, following some staffing issues last year. Newly appointed and existing staff with excellent subject expertise, ably led by the subject leader, make a deep contribution to developing other members of the department. English subject experts have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, which they share and model for their colleagues. However, new approaches are not yet consistent across all classes and groups.
- The school has wisely focused on improving the quality of teaching for the most able, which in most cases is successfully developing their capacity to work and think independently. For example, in key stage 3, most-able pupils deliver presentations to their parents on an extended project of their choice.
- For a small number of pupils, some of whom are disadvantaged, teaching does not enhance their learning and progress well enough. This is because some teachers do not challenge pupils to do better; consequently, the work they produce is not always the best of which they are capable.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. There is a tremendous sense of purpose, drive and energy among pupils. The vast majority of pupils thrive in the positive and affirming atmosphere that permeates the school.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of additional opportunities and activities provided. A sizeable number of them have an equalities dimension, which contributes to pupils feeling nurtured, safe and well cared for. Of note is the very active pupil group dedicated to raising awareness of homophobia, which recently won an award from the Speaker of the House of Commons.
- An overwhelming proportion of pupils praise how caring the school is, and the vast majority of parents echo their sentiments. One pupil commented, 'I love it here; I wouldn't want to go anywhere else.' Parents are equally delighted with the high levels of care that the school provides. Comments such as, 'The teachers care and in turn this means the children care' were frequent on Parent View.
- Leaders ensure that pupils access highly effective careers advice and guidance. Careers education programmes successfully combine practice job interviews with online guidance and pupils access up-to-date information from local employers at an annual careers fair. External independent guidance is sensibly prioritised so that disadvantaged pupils and those who have not made plans for the future receive it first.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. In most classes, pupils' conduct is excellent. Pupils listen carefully, responding very well when they are given instructions or reminded about expectations. Around school, pupils' behaviour is exceptionally calm and considerate.
- Pupils show high levels of respect and courtesy to their teachers and each other. On the rare occasions when teaching is slightly less engrossing than is usual, pupils' behaviour remains strong.
- Heads of year and support staff successfully assist pupils to overcome obstacles to succeeding at school and also target disadvantaged pupils, so that they maintain positive attitudes. Consequently, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are temporarily excluded from school has reduced. Leaders only use exclusion, having exhausted all other possibilities.
- Leaders have also vastly reduced the number of pupils who are educated off-site, and the very few who are off-site behave well, are safe and respond positively to the provision.
- Overall attendance is at least in line with the national average. Leaders are ensuring that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is gradually improving. They have wisely employed incentives as well as sanctions, which include prosecution, to improve the attendance of a small group of persistently absent pupils. While for some these

approaches have worked well, for a minority they have been less successful, despite leaders' unceasing efforts.

- Throughout the school, pupils and staff alike show each other mutual respect. As a consequence, incidents of bullying are rare and, when they very occasionally occur, leaders deal with them in a highly effective manner.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Broadly speaking, outcomes are improving rapidly due to better teaching and, as a consequence, pupils' overall progress in 2016 GCSE examinations was significantly above average.
- Most pupils make strong progress from their starting points and some make very strong progress. Differences between disadvantaged pupils and others are mostly diminishing. However, in some subjects, where teaching is less consistently strong, rates of improvement are more variable, especially for disadvantaged pupils.
- Effective teaching means pupils' achievement is now mostly strong across a range of practical and academic subjects. For instance, pupils achieved significantly above average in 2016 GCSE examinations in mathematics, physical education, German and business studies and above average in history and resistant materials.
- Mathematics teachers work very well with pupils and have well-established, high expectations of all pupils. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics is significantly above average and differences in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and others are narrow.
- Pupils' progress in science is not as strong as in mathematics. Recent changes, including a new subject leader and alterations to the GCSE courses on offer, mean pupils' progress is now improving. However, improvements are not yet consistent across all classes and groups.
- Progress in English is improving significantly after weaker outcomes for some groups in English language in 2016, and below-average attainment in English literature in 2015. For the most part, weaknesses were caused by staffing turbulence. Some changes that are intended to lead to better outcomes are still in their infancy and not fully embedded across all classes and groups. For instance, well-planned support which is being provided for teachers so they can further enhance pupils' understanding of pre-20th century texts is not yet fully bedded in.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is mostly improving. The difference between the progress this group is making and that of others nationally is diminishing, following some underachievement in 2015 and 2016 examinations. Leaders are aware that these improvements, though strong in some areas, are not yet consistent across all subjects and classes. They have strong plans in place to enhance levels of consistency.
- Published information for disadvantaged pupils in 2016 indicated that their progress was well below average in some subjects. However, overall scores were adversely affected by the very poor progress of some pupils who were educated off-site and had significant personal barriers to surmount.
- Most-able pupils' progress is improving, and so more are fulfilling their potential, due to

senior leaders focusing on improving this group's achievement. In some subject areas, improvements are more pronounced than in others. Evidence from pupils' work in books showed that a very small number of teachers do not have high enough expectations of most-able pupils, especially most-able disadvantaged pupils.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including the very small number of pupils now educated off-site, are doing better. Their improved progress is due to leaders' positive changes to monitoring and provision. For example, teaching assistants now work more closely with subject leaders so they can provide more in-depth subject support for pupils.
- Last academic year, some pupils with additional needs, who were educated off-site, made extremely weak progress, as measured by success in external examinations. For most of this group, this was because of specific personal circumstances, which had a negative impact on their progress, despite the school's strong support and best efforts.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next stages. The majority of pupils continue their studies in the school's sixth form and most of those who leave school go on to training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Well-planned changes to the way the sixth form is led and organised, as well as to the content of 16 to 19 study programmes, are leading to improvements, following some mixed outcomes over the past two years.
- Leaders have made positive changes to entry requirements, which are now based more on whether courses are appropriate to students' needs and abilities. As a result, rates of retention are improving, as are outcomes, including the narrowing of gaps between boys' achievement compared with girls'.
- Students' progress scores are set to improve in this year's examinations. Leaders closely track students' progress against carefully considered target grades. They vigilantly follow up on those who are not in line to meet their targets and ensure they are given the extra assistance required. Where necessary, leaders provide support and challenge for teachers, recognising that improvements need to be swift.
- Teaching is mostly good. Teachers consistently employ agreed assessment approaches. For example, in a number of classes, students make good use of clear criteria for success, which their teachers provide. These criteria are based on teachers' strong subject expertise, as well as their deep understanding of examination requirements.
- Teaching is effective in mathematics and English GCSE resits, where pupils succeed well. In a number of A-level subjects, such as history, mathematics and philosophy, pupils are intellectually stimulated by teachers' carefully crafted questions and tasks that require them to evaluate ideas and theories. However, this level of challenge is not yet a consistent feature across all sixth-form classes. Some teachers do not provide students with tasks that are demanding enough.
- Careers advice and guidance are effective because this support is independently delivered one-to-one and forms part of students' study programmes. Students are given high levels of support in deciding on their next steps, including with personal

statements for higher education places. The percentage of students applying for, and receiving offers from, top universities is increasing. The vast majority fulfil their plans, whether progressing to further education/training or gaining employment.

- Study programmes have been developed so that they include more opportunities for supported study within the sixth-form centre. They are bespoke to pupils' needs but there are relatively few level-two courses offered due to viability of very small classes.
- Many students extensively develop their wider skills through a very impressive annual trip to the school's community partners in the Gambia. The trip successfully enhances students' practical and organisational skills through their leadership of fundraising events. In addition, students also effectively develop their debating and decision-making skills because decisions about how funds are used are made in collaboration with the school's partners in the Gambia. Students involved in this annual trip describe it as 'life-changing'.
- Students really enjoy their studies and appreciate the more adult environment of the sixth-form study centre. Students feel safe and well looked after and conduct themselves maturely. Leaders acknowledge that while there are benefits to being separate from the school, opportunities for leadership of younger pupils are limited. Leaders have robust plans to widen opportunities for students to make a deeper contribution to school life. However, their plans are yet to be fully implemented.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 137982 |
| Local authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 10024803 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,295 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 367 |
| Appropriate authority | The trustees |
| Chair | Mr Nigel Gourlay |
| Headteacher | Ms Anna Robinson |
| Telephone number | 01892 603000 |
| Website | www.beacon-academy.org |
| Email address | c.murton@beacon-academy.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 18–19 April 2013 |

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It converted to become an academy in 2012.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed (in September

2015), and a new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2014. There have also been substantial changes to the leadership team.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is well below average. Just over one in 10 pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided for children in local authority care and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school shares its site with a local special school, Grove Park School, some of whose students attend lessons at the school. The sixth-form site is separate from the school's main site.
- A very small number of students follow courses provided by a local college of further education.
- Relatively few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. English is the first language for the majority of pupils.
- The proportion of pupils receiving support because they have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion supported through education, health and care plans.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was initially a section 8 inspection led by an Ofsted Inspector. On being deemed section 5, one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors took over leading the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered evidence from a series of short visits made to lessons, and also longer visits. In some instances, inspectors were accompanied by the headteacher, and on some occasions, they were accompanied by a senior leader. A total of 51 longer and short visits were made. Inspectors also attended an assembly and tutor time.
- Pupils’ behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes. A telephone call was made to the local authority, focusing on the support the school provides for other schools.
- Inspectors scrutinised a selection of books chosen by the school on the first day of the inspection and on the second day they conducted a wider work scrutiny.
- Inspectors met separately with the headteacher on several occasions. Inspectors also met with senior leaders for a range of meetings focusing on different issues, including safeguarding and attendance.
- Meetings were also held with governors, including the chair of the trustees, middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, the special educational needs coordinator and the senior leadership team. Inspectors met with five groups of pupils: two groups on the first day and three groups on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors also met separately with sixth-form students.
- Inspectors scrutinised 100 responses to the staff questionnaire, 17 responses to the pupil survey and 187 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors scrutinised 125 comments made via free text. Inspectors also took into account two letters from parents and a letter from a student.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school’s strategic planning documents, minutes of governing body meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, risk assessments, records of the checks made on staff when they are appointed and records relating to pupils’ safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

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| Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Colin Lankester | Ofsted Inspector |
| Richard Carlyle | Ofsted Inspector |
| Gerard Strong | Ofsted Inspector |
| Pat Slonecki | Ofsted Inspector |
| Frederick Valletta | Ofsted Inspector |
| Theresa Phillips | Her Majesty’s Inspector |

Mark Bagust, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Colin Lankester

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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