

Inspection of an outstanding school: Beacon Hill Academy

Erriff Drive, South Ockendon, Essex RM15 5AY

Inspection dates:

12–13 November 2019

Outcome

Beacon Hill Academy continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Beacon Hill is an inspirational learning community. It is a friendly, happy and welcoming school. Pupils smile throughout the day because they enjoy school. Staff know the pupils exceptionally well. They care about the pupils. Staff are passionate about providing them with the best possible learning experiences.

Staff have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are highly skilled and have a precise knowledge of pupils' needs. Staff do not allow pupils' needs to be a barrier to attainment. They are proud of pupils' accomplishments and celebrate every success.

Every pupil has a voice because staff are experts in using pupils' individual ways of communicating. This enables pupils to express their likes and dislikes and give their opinions. Staff are quick to notice changes in pupils' emotions. Swift actions mean that pupils are relaxed in school. Behaviour is excellent because staff support pupils to manage their emotions. Staff help pupils to socialise, so they work and play well together. There is no bullying.

Skilled teachers adapt lessons so that all pupils can take part in all subjects. Pupils have the opportunity to develop their independence through classroom activities and local community projects.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have high ambitions for the pupils. Staff share their ambition. There is a constant drive to improve provision because 'there is always room for improvement'. As a result, many pupils exceed their targets.

Pupils follow a highly personalised curriculum that is centred on their needs. Leaders use a range of knowledge, including the pupils' education health and care (EHC) plans, to plan pupils' learning programmes.

Teachers understand the specific needs of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. They meticulously plan learning so that each activity builds on what they have learned before. Teaching supports pupils to know, do and remember more in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers are also skilled at adapting their planning. This allows pupils to explore the topics that interest them in more detail. They are also moved on to new learning when they lose concentration.

The school places a great deal of emphasis on developing pupils' independence. We saw many examples in lessons. For example, students in the sixth form were able to collect items from their locker without help and pupils were seen initiating a musical activity at breaktime that all the class decided to take part in.

Pupils' communication skills are developed exceptionally well. Staff are skilled at finding ways to enable pupils to communicate. Whether it is using pictures, sign language, communication aids, or just an eye or finger movement, pupils are able to make themselves understood. Parents commented on the positive effects that being able to communicate has had at home.

Staff work closely with other professionals to get pupils as mobile as possible. The ability to move can be life changing for some pupils, for example being able to move around the classroom to choose equipment and sit at a desk.

Students in the sixth form get the support they need to prepare them for adulthood. Much of the students' learning takes place in the community. By the time the students are ready to leave school they are exceptionally well prepared because they have been given the opportunity to try a variety of options available to them.

Children in the early years get off to an excellent start. Teachers spend time getting to know the child and family before they enter the nursery. As a result, staff are able to develop learning programmes that address the children's needs. Activities are interesting and stimulating. Where possible, children are encouraged to do things for themselves. Children are happy and well cared for. As a result, they thrive.

Learning is enriched through a range of interesting activities. Pupils study music, dance, drama and art. Pupils take part in the Trailblazers project, where they work with pupils from mainstream schools on drama, art and music. Lunchtime clubs provide an excellent range of activities. The school council provides leadership opportunities.

Senior leaders have successfully shared their vision with staff. They have galvanised staff who work together as a team. Staff enjoy working at the school. They describe the school as a family. They are very complimentary of how leaders support their well-being. They say, 'We care about the school as the school cares about us.'

The school provides SEND support and training for mainstream schools and nurseries. The local authority considers the school's outreach work to be exemplary due to leaders' commitment to support mainstream schools. As a result, teachers in local schools are better placed to meet the needs of their SEND pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Keeping pupils safe is at the centre of the school's work. Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding, including medical and personal care of pupils. They know pupils well, so they are quick to report any concerns they may have about a child's well-being or safety, and they know the procedures for reporting concerns. The safeguarding lead takes swift action to follow up all referrals. The school works closely with support agencies to keep pupils safe.

Leaders make sure all the necessary pre-employment checks are carried out before anyone can work with the pupils. Governors ensure that they fulfil their duties with regard to safeguarding.

Background

When we have judged a special school, pupil referral unit or maintained nursery school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged Beacon Hill Academy to be outstanding on 4 May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	138736
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10110322
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Anthony Fish
Headteacher	Sue Hewitt
Website	www.beaconhill.thurrock.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 May 2016

Information about this school

- Beacon Hill is a special school that caters from the age of 2 to 19 years. It is a split-site school with post-16 education located in Buxton Road, Grays. All other year groups are located in Erriff Drive, South Ockendon.
- The school provides for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have Education Health and Care Plans.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders. Inspectors also met with a range of teaching and support staff.
- Inspectors evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of communication, physical development and becoming independent. Inspectors

discussed curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to teachers from the lessons. Inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders when visiting lessons and looking at pupils' work.

- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record was reviewed. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leader and reviewed processes and procedures related to safeguarding.
- The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with the school council.
- We observed pupils arriving at the start of the day and a breaktime. The lead inspector visited the post-16 site.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 16 members of staff who completed the school's own questionnaire.
- Inspectors took into account the 10 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, including the 7 free-text responses and two letters from parents.

Inspection team

Caroline Pardy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Fran Fitzgerald

Ofsted Inspector

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