

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Beacon Hill Academy

Erriff Drive, South Ockendon, Essex RM15 5AY

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 February 2025

Outcome

Beacon Hill Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff at this school wholly understand and embody the school's motto: 'achievement has no boundaries'. They leave no stone unturned to ensure that every pupil, no matter how complex their needs, makes as much progress as they can. Staff know the needs of their pupils in real detail. They design the curriculum to precisely meet these needs. As a result, pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.

Pupils relish attending school. Staff work tenaciously to ensure pupils communicate their choices, needs and feelings clearly. This gives pupils a genuine voice in their provision. Consequently, pupils trust staff fully and engage enthusiastically in the stimulating activities provided for them. Pupils learn about the diverse world around them. They learn about religious festivals. Pupils visit a local museum to learn about the history of migration. The school works with prestigious cultural providers to introduce pupils to opera and ballet.

The school is ambitious about what pupils can achieve in their lives beyond school. Staff ensure that pupils are exceptionally well prepared for adulthood. Pupils learn self-care skills such as brushing their teeth and learning how to cook. Pupils develop their self-confidence and resilience when they take part in activities such as work experience and visiting local shops.

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

The curriculum at Beacon Hill Academy is bespoke for every pupil. When pupils are about to join, staff look at each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan with parents,

carers, and professionals. They precisely identify the support, and the curriculum, pupils require to meet their needs. They find out pupils' interests and aspirations. The school puts together an ambitious 'learning adventure' tailored for each pupil. Reflective staff regularly check how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs. They review and adjust the curriculum based on these checks. When necessary, the school will call upon the support of local health and social care providers to cater for each pupil's needs.

The school has put communication at the heart of its offer. Many different approaches are skilfully used with and by pupils. These include the use of eye-gaze, sign language and communication boards. Pupils' sensory development is supported by the use of 'dark rooms'. For those who can do so, lessons build pupils' phonics knowledge and writing. This precisely designed provision ensures that pupils learn how to express themselves and regulate their behaviour. This equips them to communicate their choices as adults.

From early years onwards, pupils make progress in their physical development. Pupils develop their mobility when, for example, they take part in 'rebound therapy' on trampolines or use the hydrotherapy pool. Pupils participate in activities that build their motor skills. Staff ensure that all activities are purposeful. As staff support pupils in these sessions, they interact with them to build their communication skills.

As pupils progress through the curriculum, they have increasing opportunities to spend more time out of school. Every week post-16 students spend at least a day a week in the local community, developing their resilience interacting with unfamiliar adults and learning new skills. The school fully supports pupils and their families with the challenges of transition to other provisions when they leave. As a result, pupils are fully prepared for their next steps.

Pupils learn about how to keep safe. To help pupils practise travel safely and with greater independence, pupils are taught to control their wheelchairs. They learn to respond to safety messages immediately. Pupils learn about the names of body parts and the importance of personal space. Staff respond with real patience and care to help pupils feel calm and safe, for instance using 'sensory stories' to help with feelings of loss. Consequently, despite many significant health issues, pupils enjoy school and attend very well.

The school never rests on its laurels. Trustees and leaders rigorously check the quality of its offer. Leaders consistently seek ways to improve provision for pupils, collaborating with and learning from other special schools. In addition, the school works closely with other schools to develop provision for pupils with SEND, such as designing curriculums related to the arts for pupils with profound learning difficulties.

Staff develop their knowledge and skills through high-quality professional development. They feel well supported with their well-being and workload. Staff turnover is very low. Parents are fully involved in decisions about their children. They praise the exemplary provision pupils receive here.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in November 2019.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years,

looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138736
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10345348
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	78
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tony Fish
Headteacher	Sue Hewitt
Website	www.beaconhill.thurrock.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Beacon Hill is a special school that caters for pupils 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. Most pupils are non-mobile and non-verbal.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with trustees of the school. He also spoke to representatives from the local authority about the school's provision.
- Inspectors focused inspection activity on the school's work to develop pupils' communication and interaction, their physical development, and the work of the school to prepare pupils for adulthood. Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to leaders about the curriculum, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interest first.
- The lead inspector considered the responses and free-text comments received during the inspection to Ofsted Parent View. He took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. The lead inspector also spoke to parents.

Inspection team

Steve Woodley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Sutton

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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