

Beccles Free School

Church Lane, Carlton Colville, Lowestoft, NR33 8AX

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leaders and trustees have succeeded in setting up a school which, whilst still small, has a clear and effective focus on high aspirations and is making progress.
- Achievement of students is good; many students who have joined the school at various ages have shown improvements in their progress.
- Students in receipt of the pupil premium make good progress, as do disabled students or those with special educational needs.
- Teaching is good and there is none that is inadequate; teachers prepare their lessons well, have good subject knowledge and are committed to the success of the school.
- Teachers take assessment very seriously; students' work is very well marked and they have plentiful information about their progress which informs the planning of lessons.
- The behaviour of students and their attitudes to learning are exemplary; students are mature and courteous, and inspectors saw no low level disruptive behaviour in any lesson.
- The school acts effectively to promote a culture of reading across all ages.
- Attendance is improving and is now good; students who join the school with previously disrupted attendance show significant improvements.
- Leaders manage the improvement of teaching well; there are several examples of teachers who have improved their practice, and staff feel well supported and consistently challenged to improve.
- The Trust and the local governing body are making a good contribution to the school's success.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers do not provide clearer enough guidance so that students are always clear what to do.
- The school does not evaluate aspects of its work such as the way it uses additional government funding.
- In some classes teachers were not able to support consistently the progress of all ability groups.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons including a range of enrichment activities; three lessons were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of students' written work.
- Meetings were held with the Principal of the Seckford Foundation Free Schools Trust, two governors, a group of parents, and two groups of students; there was also a staff discussion group.
- Inspectors reviewed many documents including the school's website, its policies, the self-evaluation, the report of pupil premium spending, records of governor meetings and the analysis of student progress data.
- Inspectors took account of 56 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted on-line questionnaire.

Inspection team

Adrian Gray, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Russell Ayling

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Beccles Free School is for students aged 11 to 16 and opened in September 2012 with students in Years 7 to 9. The school currently has 198 students from Years 7 to 10 and will extend to include Year 11 students from September 2014. It serves a wide geographical rural area so over 85% of students travel to school by bus.
- The school is currently situated temporarily in Carlton Colville, in buildings which used to be a primary school. The school is smaller than average with no more than two classes for any year group, but it is full in two of the current four year groups. In September 2014, the school will move to a larger, permanent site in Beccles.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium is broadly average (pupil premium is funding provided by the government to support students who are looked after by the local authority and those who are eligible for free school meals.)
- There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not make use of any alternative educational provision.
- As part of the Seckford Foundation Free Schools Trust, the school benefits from partnership working with other schools in the Trust and with Woodbridge School, an independent school which is part of the wider Seckford Foundation. The headteacher of the school reports to the Principal of the Free Schools Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Convert good teaching into outstanding and improve achievement by:
 - ensuring that students are always clear what to do, why they are doing it and how they can evaluate each other's success
 - all groups of students learn at a rapid pace in all lessons through tasks which stretches all of them to persevere and do their very best
 - raise expectations of what students should contribute to lessons and deepen their learning by challenging and responding to each other
 - providing the support of skilled additional adults in classes where there is a wide range of student abilities
 - more effectively analysing the impact of initiatives such as reading schemes and student premium spending so that they can be used to best effect.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start the school with a wide range of skills and abilities; although some are very able, their standards on entry, overall, are around the national average.
- The oldest students in the school are now in Year 10 and the school does not yet have any national exam results to evaluate their performance. In addition, many students have transferred to the school only recently. The school tracks progress using detailed assessment of students' National Curriculum sub-levels and benchmarks these by working with the Trust partner school.
- The achievement of students, based on their progress since arriving at the school, is good and improving. Accurate monitoring of students' performance and evaluation of their progress, coupled with timely intervention when needed, provides a sound basis for their learning. With the quality of teaching also improving, all groups of students make expected progress or better.
- The significant numbers who have joined in the middle of the school year, either this year or last makes analysis of students' progress more complex for the school. There is emerging evidence that these students show improved progress once they have settled into the school, responding to its high expectations. Students who have been in the school for longer periods often demonstrate greater than expected progress and attain well above average, for example the group of Year 9 students who were observed working on high level problems in mathematics.
- Leaders have established a culture where reading is an expectation and students all carry reading books with them around the school. Although many opt for a limited range of teenage genres, there is a process for encouraging them to experiment more widely in their reading choices.
- This pattern is consistent across different groups of learners. Students with special educational needs, those in receipt of the student premium and those who are carers, are all doing well. Some of the students in receipt of pupil premium have made better than expected progress in the short time they have been in the school; they benefit from a range of extra provision and benefit from the ambitious ethos of the school. Some of these make as good and better progress than those from more advantaged backgrounds. This is also true for other small groups of learners such as those eligible for Year 7 catch up funding; numbers are small so that, although individuals are responding well, it is too early to identify clear patterns.
- More able pupils benefit from the culture of academic study that the school has fostered. These pupils are confident about expressing their views and are ambitious for themselves. They respond well and make strong progress in lessons which provide them with a range of challenges but they are less challenged when, for example, the teachers' use of questioning to individual pupils holds back the development of the learning.
- Achievement is well supported over time by the efforts of teachers. For example, homework is set regularly as a means of identifying or correcting weaknesses in work and students have additional opportunities at lunch and other times to complete work with their teachers. When speaking with inspectors, students confirm that they feel they are appropriately challenged in lessons and are making good progress. Progress is generally consistent across all subjects.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in the school has played a key role in students' success in accelerating their progress over time. Students report that teaching is good and engages their interest. A number said that their progress has improved since they started at this school. During the inspection, learning in lessons was seen to be very largely good with almost all students fully engaged in their work.
- Teachers and leaders have high expectations of the students and this is reflected in the classroom. They clearly act as role models for their students, who respond to them very positively; relationships are strong and respectful in both directions. Students respond well to the high aspirations, for example in the completion of homework or by attending classrooms to complete work at lunchtimes.
- For the most part, teachers plan lessons well but they sometimes struggle to accommodate a very wide range of abilities without any additional support and, on occasions, in classrooms that are not really suitable for the size of class. Inspectors saw classes where students were working in setted classes but at levels up to five years' of development apart. For example, in one lesson a small group of pupils was working well above age-related expectations but a small group of lower ability learners did not fully understand their tasks and over-rated their own progress. As a result, in some lessons small groups of students, at either end of the ability range, made less progress than others.
- Most teachers plan activities that engage students and promote effective learning. However in some lessons students move into tasks too quickly so that some are not clear about what they are learning. In some lessons, the tasks are not clearly explained and some students do not grasp key terms; for example, in one lesson, students were asked to identify 'important' text but lacked the criteria to judge what was important. In another, research evidence was gathered without sufficient focus on what would be relevant or irrelevant.
- Some teachers show strong awareness of their role in supporting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, teachers in science expected students to work together to present their researches using skills in text analysis and computers, whilst in other lessons students had to respond to reflective questions. Students are not always given the opportunity to respond to each other's views or to debate challenging issues.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide very constructive feedback so students know how to improve their work. Students say that these written comments together with the conversations they have with their teacher are a great help in guiding them to do better and to reach their ambitious targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students display a thirst for knowledge and in many cases were seen to demonstrate a love of learning. Parents, students and staff all commented very positively on behaviour and attitudes over time. The school is successfully providing an academic atmosphere where excellence is prized. The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- Students are able to work effectively as individuals, in small groups or as whole classes. They display positive attitudes and enjoy being challenged; the quality of relationships with each other and with staff is outstanding. The quality of behaviour since the school opened has been one of its most positive features. Behaviour in the classroom is exemplary – inspectors saw no examples of students challenging a teacher or trying to distract each other, so that the vast

majority of time in the classroom is actually spent engaged in learning.

- Behaviour is equally positive around the school site, in the corridors and at breaks. Students are courteous, polite and respectful of each other. Bullying in any form is rare and, when anything takes place it is dealt with quickly and effectively; most students struggled to recall any examples that they had heard of but could discuss different forms of bullying.
- Although the students play a full part in this success, much of it is also due to the efforts of the school. Some students arrive having had disruptive behaviour patterns in previous schools or long periods of absence. These students respond well to the school's firm guidance as they adjust to the ethos of their new school. The school has a well-understood system for monitoring behaviour; patterns are analysed, interventions to support student needs are made, and the results evaluated.
- Attendance has improved since 2012-3, when it was below average, to the position in the current year when it is above average. Attendance has been a challenge for the school as it has admitted a number of students who were previously persistent absentees; these mostly show clear improvement. Due to the small size of the school, absence of one or two students over a longer period has a significant impact on the figures.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe at the school and their parents agree. Students understand key risks to their safety. The small size of the school enhances the sense of a community, so that students are able to discuss risks and share any concerns readily. Students know who to turn to in the event of any problems. The school's own processes for ensuring safety are very secure.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's senior leaders, including the energetic and enthusiastic headteacher, have succeeded in creating a new school with a culture of high expectations. The embryonic middle leadership group are starting to make their own useful contributions; middle leaders are only just starting to play a significant role in the school due to the small size of their current teams and the early stages of curriculum development.
- Members of staff are proud of the school and enjoy working in it; they are developing a strong culture of working and learning together which will form a basis for their professional development. Students are responding well to what is asked of them academically and the quality of their social development is impressive. Some of this has been achieved through innovative means, including the expectation that all dine together in the restaurant every day which helps to create a relaxed mood of adult social interaction.
- The school is part way through a development plan that will take it from its foundation through to the opening of the new school in Beccles. This is supported by honest self-evaluation, which is accurate in reflecting the school's place on its journey; self-evaluation is still limited by the lack of external data and some gaps in what is available, such as the impact of student premium spending displayed on the website or of the extended curriculum. The school cannot be certain that student premium funding is only spent on those for whom it is intended.
- Leaders have secured improvement in the quality of teaching since the school's first year. Staff who are less consistently effective have been provided with support plans and have made progress. Teachers say they are happy with the professional development provided and newly

qualified teachers are confident that their needs are being met. Senior leaders monitor classes regularly and provide perceptive feedback. The next stage of development will be to build an analysis of the actions that will best help promote outstanding learning.

- The school has a teaching week of thirty hours that is longer than normal but the impact of this might be reduced by a proposal to extend the autumn half term. It uses the extra time to create additional opportunities in the curriculum to extend learning, for instance through 'enrichment' time. Here students have a choice from a range of modules which include drama, music, cooking and 'boys to men'. Some of the extra time is also used for extra mathematics and literacy, or to provide additional time for GCSE subjects although the only modern foreign language offered is French.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is mapped across the school and supported well in some lessons, including science. It is also developed through additional activities, such as a day focusing on the impact of immigration. However inspectors saw no examples of pupils being asked to challenge each others' views in lessons whilst their understanding of other cultural groups found within England is relatively limited: although the school has some links with Christian groups and the elderly community, it has not conducted any research into the other faith groups in the Lowestoft area which it might build links with.
- The headteacher is supported and challenged by a Principal who has a leadership role and quality assurance across the Trust and a Trust Education Committee which provides additional capacity in education expertise. The Principal of the Trust monitors areas such as teaching and gives strategic advice on how it can be further improved. At the moment the distance between the schools limits mutual support, although the schools do co-operate in some professional development activities and physical education staff work in both. Staff are contracted to the Trust but are placed in one of the schools; it is anticipated that the Trust will develop its staff and may move them to other schools as part of succession planning.
- Staff at the school have worked with the local authority on professional issues such as moderation, but for the last eight months the local authority has not ensured that the requirement of the school's funding agreement for at least one local authority representative on the governing body is met. Although staff at the two schools in the trust work together on professional development, for example in English, and there are plans to develop co-operation with other free schools in Suffolk, links to other schools in general are limited.
- The school has begun to develop a programme of activities to prepare young people for the world of work but there is developing provision for careers advice at present. Although the school has some links with business, it has chosen not to include substantial vocational elements into its curriculum. There is a developing relationship with Lowestoft College.
- Parents and students are strongly supportive of the school. The school conducts its own surveys of parent and student attitudes, which are very largely positive; one of the most common issues raised is to do with homework, but there are mixed views as to whether there is too much or too little. Inspectors saw homework used regularly, though its purpose was not always well-defined.
- Safeguarding arrangements are secure. Leaders have sound processes for making checks on those they employ and who access the site, including external staff who support extra-curricular work. A senior member of staff monitors arrangements at regular intervals.
- The Trust and the Department for Education have made substantial investments in the start-up costs of the school. Because of its initial small size, the need to create a leadership structure within the Trust and the use of a temporary site, headline per student costs appear high but

when start-up funding is discounted then actual spending is in line with similar schools. The budget last year was well managed so that the school finished with balanced books despite the impact of so many additional students transferring in.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The local governing body and the Trust have ensured that the school has made a successful start and has largely overcome the initial challenges of its small size.
- Governing body minutes show that governors are aware of the importance of understanding and challenging performance data whilst they also discuss the quality of teaching; their ability to provide challenge is enhanced by some governors taking on roles across the different schools and the Trust, although this does mean that governors are not always 'local' to this school.
- Governors are allocated specific links, such as numeracy, but have themselves noted that there is no system for recording the findings from governor visits to the school or feeding back on learning from these.
- Governors are well aware of pupil premium and challenge staff on how it is spent; at a recent meeting they clarified that more could be done to show the impact of how it was being used to support progress in English. The format used to report this on the website does not provide full information on where the money is being spent.
- Governors discuss performance management in an appropriate manner; the headteacher has been set sensible targets based around securing a good standard of education and managing the move to the new site.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138274
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	425170

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bill Mayne
Headteacher	John Lucas
Date of previous school inspection	None
Telephone number	01502 526640
Fax number	01502 526646
Email address	enquiries@becclesfreeschool.org.uk

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