

Baxter College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135062
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	381797
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	990
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Winter
Headteacher	David Seddon (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2009
School address	Habberley Road Kidderminster DY11 5PQ
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Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	14–15 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Brian Cartwright

Her Majesty's Inspector

Steven Goldsmith

Additional inspector

Jonathan Smart

Additional inspector

Kathleen Yates(2)

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 45 lessons taught by 44 teachers, met with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, spoke with a representative of the local authority, and met with different groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at records of student performance, the school's self-evaluation and development plans, governing body minutes, and the work of current students. Inspectors received 305 parental questionnaires, 119 student questionnaires and 65 staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

Baxter College is a specialist business and enterprise college of average size for secondary schools with a small sixth form. It occupies a large campus west of Kidderminster town centre, using buildings of former middle and upper schools that were reorganised into a secondary school in 2007 as part of Wyre Forest reorganisation. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds. There are low proportions of students from different heritage backgrounds, and a low proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. A higher than average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is higher than average. The school meets current floor standards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Baxter College is a good school. It is rapidly improving, with a good sixth form, and is exceptionally well led and managed by a dedicated principal who inspires a strong team of committed teaching and support staff. All major performance aspects of the school have improved from satisfactory to good since the previous inspection, because of outstanding leadership. Leaders evaluate provision accurately and effectively, including the performance of staff, and take robust action to resolve any shortfalls. The school is not outstanding because student achievement and teaching is not outstanding.
- Student achievement is rising quickly, through effective teaching and a carefully constructed curriculum that gives them plenty of opportunities to achieve well. All students gain useful qualifications and almost all continue to education or employment. Improving literacy standards are helping to improve overall student success and remain a priority. However, students do not always have sufficient opportunities to develop their reading, writing and speaking skills across all subjects, and in extended learning (homework) activities.
- Students enjoy lessons and school life, and are overwhelmingly supportive of their school. They behave well, usually try hard in lessons, and feel safe and well cared for in school. Their parents and carers echo these sentiments and would strongly recommend the school to others.
- Teaching is good, with common strengths of good pace, interesting subject content and excellent teacher-student working relationships. Teachers strive hard to raise aspirations. Occasional shortfalls in teaching and learning can be traced to missed opportunities for students to develop independent learning, mismatched tasks that do not challenge students enough, and some gaps in the effectiveness of diagnostic marking. Students are not always involved enough in evaluating their own work and those of their peers. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very well supported, because the school is effective in adapting the curriculum to meet their varying needs.

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- As well as the good taught curriculum there is an extensive range of additional opportunities that widen horizons for students beyond their local community to other worlds and higher education. This makes a strong contribution to developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the improvements to teaching quality by:
 - refining the planning of lesson activities to ensure full engagement and challenge for learners of all abilities from the outset
 - ensuring students get regular, well-supported opportunities to develop their independent learning skills
 - consolidating the good marking practice that includes clear advice to students on what they need to do to improve their work
 - securing every opportunity for students to improve their literacy skills, by increasing the time they spend reading, writing and speaking about their learning across all subjects.
- Further develop the involvement of students in assessing the quality of their own and others' work.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The attainment of most pupils arriving in Year 7 is below average, with particular shortfalls for many pupils in their literacy skills. About a third of students are on the school's register of special educational needs. During their time in school all students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make good progress overall. This is most marked at Key Stage 4, because of the careful matching of different curriculum pathways to individual students. Girls in particular achieved very well in 2011, and boys did at least as well as expected. All but a couple of parents and carers agree that their children are making good progress; inspection findings support their views. Attainment in 2011 was at least average and often above average across the range of summary measures, including the proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE or equivalent grades of C or better. Academic standards in the sixth form are below average but represent at least satisfactory progress overall for all students. Many Year 12 students move on to other providers at the end of the year, having benefitted from an extra year at Baxter College to establish personal confidence. Those who complete A level courses in Year 13 do well, and all those who applied for higher education were successful.

The performance of current students is even better at this stage of their Year 11 courses compared with the previous year. In the majority of lessons observed,

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students achieve well, particularly when the activity is interesting and challenging. For example, in a good Year 7 mathematics lesson about areas of triangles, students responded eagerly to the enthusiasm and energy of the teacher's graphic explanations, appreciated the feedback of their progress and were proud of their efforts. In an outstanding Year 11 BTEC science lesson on antibiotics, students carefully set up cultures of microbes, learning and eventually mastering difficult practical techniques. They took the investigation very seriously, recognising the potential hazards involved, and then enthusiastically worked in pairs to read further and then summarise the impact of the work of Alexander Fleming.

Students benefit from, and much appreciate, the extensive programme of additional study, revision and catch-up sessions including Saturday morning classes. Focused support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs are effective in ensuring their good progress, improved attendance, and improving capacity to manage their own learning. Students also enjoy the rich programme of cultural and sporting extra-curricular clubs, visits and residential trips that the school provides. These activities play a substantial part in developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural sensitivities and awareness.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good, with several instances of outstanding teaching observed during the inspection. Students and their parents and carers justifiably are also overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching.

The best practice uses the teacher's expert subject knowledge to construct activities that let students experience key concepts for themselves. For example, in an outstanding Year 13 physics lesson, students carried out an investigation using 'ripple tanks' to find out how water waves travel through gaps and around barriers. As they experimented, they found out for themselves, with expert teacher prompts, the underlying principle of the interference of waves. Lessons generally have rapid pace, with little time wasted in teacher discourse. Students get plenty of time to tackle challenging activities, which demand their concentration, with teachers using good questioning techniques to provoke further thinking by students. This approach requires teachers to have high expectations of what students can achieve when given the chance, and also develops students' social and spiritual skills. Many lessons also include ethical and moral issues which students need to address. These can occur in any subject, not just through the effective personal, social, and health education or religious education curriculum. For example, a science lesson on mankind's impact on the environment led students to discuss the causes of global warming, and the consequences of our continued combustion of fossil fuels. In the minority of lessons where teaching is satisfactory, students do not have to do much by way of thinking, or speaking in full sentences, or careful listening, or writing in a creative or independent way; too much is done for them, for example with undemanding worksheets requiring only a few single words to complete.

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The school relies heavily on detailed academic setting in many subjects. One consequence of this is that the majority of lesson plans do not sufficiently plan different starting points specifically to distinguish between the varying abilities of students. There is good 'unplanned' practice, however, in most lessons as teachers use their personal knowledge of each student to adjust their learning moment by moment, for example in physical education. A developing aspect of many lessons is to give students opportunities to assess their own and others' progress, allowing them better to understand the requirements of the task.

Marking is at least satisfactory, with good practice evident across all subjects that includes clear advice on the next steps students should make, although not always consistently applied in every case. The science faculty, for example, uses 'Post-It' notes with a 'BQ' (Bridging question) that most students respond to in writing.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since the previous inspection, low attendance has substantially improved and is now broadly average. The school uses a wide range of strategies to encourage good attendance, and continues to work hard to persuade families of a minority of students of the importance of their children's regular attendance. Despite these efforts, a few students, including those on examination courses, still take unauthorised holidays in term time, damaging their chances of success.

There is a much lower than national, and still declining, proportion of fixed and permanent exclusions. Occasional instances of low-level disruption do occur and students, staff and parents and carers point this out in the surveys, although most are confident that behaviour is good. Inspectors met polite, cheerful and enthusiastic students of all abilities and backgrounds, both in formal meetings, around the school and in lessons, all of whom confirmed they enjoy school, feel safe, and are confident the school usually, but not always, deals consistently with any misbehaviour. This includes virtually unanimous agreement that the school deals with any types of bullying very well. Students spoke highly of recent guidance from the school on dealing with cyber-bullying and could explain how to tackle it. In the lessons observed, student behaviour was attentive and polite, and all pupils worked hard once they had the chance to get started; only when class discussion was too long, or the task too easy, did they chatter and occasionally lose some concentration.

Leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, almost all aspects of the school have improved substantially, and are continuing to do so. Primarily this is because the principal has widely established among his staff and the local community his deeply held conviction that students from this locality are capable of educational and personal success. This relentless optimism, patience and intolerance of underperformance is shared by senior and middle managers, and backed up by very careful, principled governance. Very good monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality results in

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effective programmes of professional development for staff; the current focus is on improving how students assess their own and others' learning. The school has demonstrated an outstanding capacity for improvement.

Student well-being is the school's priority, including the development of their academic and personal potential, but also in the exemplary operation of policies to ensure child protection. Every child matters greatly to Baxter College, and the school is now very well regarded by its various users, including parents, carers and students.

The curriculum is good because managers carefully review and adapt it to help each student fulfil their potential. Currently, the relatively weak literacy of many students as they arrive in school is leading to even more investment in teaching literacy, both through more English time and in a common whole-school approach to tackling it. The balance of academic to vocational courses is shifting towards predominantly academic as student attainment improves. A major strength of the school curriculum is the extensive programme of activities designed to raise self-esteem, cultural understanding, community participation and moral and spiritual maturity. All students, from any circumstance, benefit as the school ensures resources are available to those in need. In conjunction with the inclusive taught curriculum, this enriched focus on personal development demonstrates the school is very good at promoting equality and tackling discrimination. These activities are only possible because Baxter staff give substantially of their time and expertise outside of the formal curriculum, for example through an extensive outdoor education programme for all students. They help students raise very large amounts of money for charitable work, and organise international events to broaden horizons; the school is a window on the wider world for its students.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Baxter College, Kidderminster, DY11 5PQ

Thank you for the polite and positive welcome we received during our inspection of your school. We are pleased to recognise substantial improvements since the school was last inspected. Baxter College is now a good school that is outstandingly well led and managed. Staff are dedicated to ensuring your welfare and safety, as well as providing you with a range of courses that help you to fulfil your academic potential. That good curriculum flexibility continues into the sixth form. Almost all of you in our survey say you are happy to come to school, and appreciate the school does well in helping you improve your basic skills. Teachers are very committed to providing activities that help widen your cultural understanding and build your self-confidence and independence. We noticed the positive working ethos in lessons that allow you to ask questions and discuss your learning. We are pleased to recognise the considerable improvements in your attendance over time, but also note a few students and their families could do better.

We agree that teaching is good or better most of the time, and never less than satisfactory. To sustain the school's improvements in teaching we have asked teachers to:

- make sure lesson activities are even better matched to your abilities and prior knowledge
- ensure all marking and feedback you receive is as good as the best
- further increase the opportunities you have to develop literacy skills
- give you more guidance on how to assess your own work.

You can help by making sure you quickly respond to the advice you receive on how to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

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