

The Basildon Upper Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135897
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	381955
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the academy roll	794
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Headteacher	Dr Rory Fox (Principal)
Date of previous academy inspection	N/A
Academy address	Wickford Avenue Basildon SS13 3HL
Telephone number	01268 552536
Fax number	01268 551209
Email address	admin@basildonacademies.org.uk

Age group	14–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Abbott	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Genevieve Usher	Additional inspector
Ogugua Okolo-Angus	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed lessons taught by 34 different teachers, each for approximately 25 minutes. They also made short visits to a number of other lessons to look at learning support and the quality of marking. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, various leaders and managers, groups of students, teaching assistants and support staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work and looked at: the academy's self-evaluation; its development plan; records relating to assessment, attendance, behaviour, lesson observations and professional development; the bullying and racist incident logs; the single central record of safeguarding checks; the minutes of governing body meetings and correspondence with the Department for Education. They analysed questionnaire responses from 131 parents and carers, 150 students and 50 members of staff.

Information about the academy

The Basildon Upper Academy and The Basildon Lower Academy are part of The Basildon Academies Trust, sponsored by the Stanton Lane Trust. They have specialist status in enterprise and mathematics. Originally, each academy had a separate Principal, overseen by an Executive Principal, but now there is a single Principal responsible for both. Turnover among other staff is high, particularly in mathematics.

The Upper Academy has been subject to a substantial building programme to create several 'learning zones', consistent with its original vision. While the premises are large, the Upper Academy is undersubscribed and its number of students is below average for a secondary school.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average overall, although a slightly higher than average percentage are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are of White British origin and a very small minority are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.

The academy was subject to a monitoring inspection in March 2011, which raised serious concerns about the standard of education it was providing. It does not meet the government's current floor standard.

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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	4
Leadership and management	4

Key findings

- In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this academy requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the academy are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.
- The academy is not satisfactory because the achievement of students, their behaviour, attendance and safety, the quality of teaching, and leadership and management are all inadequate. The sixth form is also inadequate.
- Achievement is inadequate because students are not equipped with the skills they need in reading, writing and mathematics. Learning and progress are inadequate in many lessons. Despite some improvement over the last two years, attainment remains low and students' progress is inadequate. Sixth-form students make satisfactory progress in the courses they complete, but too many drop some of their subjects, so their achievement is also inadequate.
- Though there is some satisfactory and some good teaching, much teaching shows low expectations and fails to capture students' interest. Weak assessment during lessons and poor use of data mean that teaching is not sufficiently adapted to meet students' needs. In some classes, students do not have an adequate record of their year's work. Too often, marking fails to provide students with regular and specific guidance on how to improve.
- Nearly a quarter of students who completed inspection questionnaires do not always feel safe at the academy and the majority think that bullying is only sometimes tackled well. A very heavy use of sanctions since September 2011 has improved behaviour to a degree, but behaviour management in lessons is not always effective. Attendance is very low and persistent absence is rife.
- The curriculum is inadequate and the academy does not sufficiently develop

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students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, resulting in a poor climate for learning. A lack of experience and appropriate expertise affects all levels of leadership, including the governing body. The leadership of teaching and the management of performance are inadequate. The regular monitoring of lessons by senior staff is broadly accurate, but not rigorous or specific enough in identifying how teachers can improve their skills. Subject leadership is underdeveloped. Improvements since the monitoring visit in March 2011 are fragile.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form by:
 - providing a curriculum that captures students' interest and imagination
 - ensuring that students are taught to synthesise information from a variety of sources and to write their responses in their own words
 - ensuring that students are taught to use and apply mathematics to real-life situations to further their understanding of the concepts and skills being learnt
 - ensuring that students receive regular and specific guidance on how to improve their work
 - ensuring that students build up and take responsibility for compiling a coherent record of their learning and progress
 - ensuring that sixth-form students are adequately prepared for the courses they take.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of independent work that students can complete in each lesson
 - using the most effective teachers, and external support if necessary, to work with colleagues to help them devise interesting, enjoyable and challenging lessons that hold students' attention
 - requiring teachers to plan explicitly to meet the needs of students working at three or more different National Curriculum levels in lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers understand the benefits of checking students' progress as they work in order to assess their understanding and to ensure that all are being continuously challenged
 - providing rigorous and specific monitoring to identify improvements needed, backed up by bespoke advice and professional development to enable each teacher to raise the quality of their teaching.
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - increasing attendance and reducing persistent absence rates as a matter of urgency, particularly among disabled students and those who have special educational needs, so that they are much closer to the national average
 - reducing the reliance on sanctions by finding more constructive

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- approaches to securing and sustaining good behaviour
 - developing a clear programme to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through lessons, tutor periods and extra-curricular opportunities
 - giving students a greater say in voicing their ideas for improving the running of the academy
 - implementing a stronger programme of anti-bullying measures so that racist and homophobic bullying is eliminated
 - identifying and addressing the reasons why some students do not feel safe in the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
- strengthening the Academy Trust's capacity for educational leadership, for example, through strategic partnerships
 - increasing leadership capacity, for example, by forming partnerships to provide effective support and guidance for senior and middle leaders
 - completing the restructuring of leadership roles to provide clear lines of accountability, particularly in relation to disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - developing a stronger role for subject leaders in improving teaching and learning, ensuring that each group of subjects has a specific development programme
 - making regular checks that agreed procedures are being implemented consistently and challenging staff when inconsistencies occur
 - ensuring that the academy complies with all health and safety requirements.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students, including those in the sixth form, make inadequate progress because of long-term weaknesses in teaching and because the curriculum does not meet their learning needs. In the minority of well taught lessons seen on the inspection, students were motivated to learn and they engaged willingly with the tasks set for them. They supported each other and showed independent learning skills, such as asking questions to clarify their own understanding, or making notes to help them revise in the future. More often, learning is satisfactory at best and students complete too little independent work. Students complete tasks with little understanding or imagination. In some vocational subjects, students show limited skills of independent research, copying text from books or the internet, rather than conveying information in their own words. When teachers condone this approach, students do not learn to write effectively. Learning and progress were inadequate in a quarter of lessons seen during the inspection, mostly due to weak teaching. Confusing explanations are sometimes made worse by students' inattention or by low-level disruption. Work that is too hard or too easy means that students make

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only intermittent efforts, resulting in a slow pace of learning. In some subjects, most notably mathematics, frequent staff changes have affected students' confidence and motivation to learn. A majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires think that students are making enough progress, but the findings of the inspection do not support this view.

When students join the academy in Year 10, they are an average of two terms behind the levels expected for their age. In recent years, progress during Key Stage 4 has been inadequate and standards have been low by the end of Year 11. Current students are making faster progress than their predecessors, but the rate is still below national expectations. Extra revision and practice, and frequent re-sit examinations in mathematics and English are helping more students to reach a grade C standard at GCSE. However, students' understanding of mathematics is fragile and they find it difficult to apply their knowledge. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make inadequate progress. In 2011, more than half underachieved. Students who are placed in isolation are not always provided with relevant work, leading them to fall further behind.

The standards attained in the sixth form are consistently below average, reflecting the students' below average prior attainment. In previous years, the academy has accepted students onto courses for which they are not adequately prepared, leading to high drop-out rates. More students are expected to complete their courses this year, leading to higher success rates, but fewer than half are currently on track to reach their targets.

Quality of teaching

There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching, which is inadequate overall, including in the sixth form. Some effective teaching creates a good working atmosphere in the classroom and enables the students to take responsibility for their own learning. However, too much time in many lessons is spent on teacher-led activities, engaging only a minority of students in class discussion. The learning objectives are displayed in most lessons, and often copied down, though teachers do not always check that students understand them. The quality of planning is variable, with too many lessons providing the same work for all students. In good lessons, time is allocated for students to work independently, giving the teacher time to check that all are making progress and then to engage individuals in discussion about improving their work. Where teachers do not make these checks, they do not adapt their teaching sufficiently to meet students' needs and sometimes move on before students are ready. In the inadequate lessons, the work is poorly matched to students' needs. Worksheets requiring short answers are over-used at the expense of notes that build up a worthwhile record of learning. Potentially higher attaining students are often frustrated by the lack of challenge while others are confused by poor explanations. There is little evidence of teachers planning to meet the specific needs of students with learning difficulties. The quality of marking is inconsistent. In some classes, work has not been marked all term. Where teachers have taken the trouble to provide constructive feedback, there is little evidence of them checking

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later to see if the student had responded.

The impact of the planned curriculum is inadequate. In mathematics, for example, the teaching programme is fragmented by high staff turnover and a policy of rotating teachers among classes. Except in English, students have too few opportunities for independently composed writing. The teaching of subject-specific vocabulary is inconsistent. For example, business studies students did not understand the terms 'import' and 'export'. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not well developed by teachers because there is no overarching plan. Where lessons are teacher-led, there is little opportunity to extend social skills or reflection. Although many courses are described as vocational, the lessons often focus on completing assignments rather than building understanding or gaining practical skills. There are some notable exceptions: good teaching of practical skills was seen in engineering, graphics, textiles and art lessons. The last three also contributed to spiritual and cultural development as students reflected on their own work and that of a range of artists.

A majority of parents and carers and just over half of students think that most teaching is good. Students are least satisfied in Year 10 and most satisfied in the sixth form.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour management system is clear and well understood by students, but inconsistently applied by staff. Behaviour in lessons and around the academy has improved since it was last visited by inspectors. Several parents and carers, students and staff members made this point to inspectors. However, several other parents and carers feel that the discipline system is too strict. The academy's behaviour records back this up: the exclusion rate is more than 20 times the national average. On the first day of the inspection, 55 students were in isolation. This policy contributes to calmer classrooms and corridors, but is not sufficiently supported by programmes to improve the behaviour of the worst offenders. Despite the improvements, behaviour remains inadequate. During the inspection, poor attitudes, lack of application to tasks and persistent low-level disruption affected four out of 24 lessons in Key Stage 4, mostly in core subjects. Students' attitudes and behaviour in sixth form lessons are satisfactory.

Attendance has improved but is still far too low and levels of persistent absence remain very high, particularly among disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The academy has improved the attendance of some persistent truants, though not to an acceptable level. The combination of low attendance and removal of pupils to isolation means that nearly one in five Key Stage 4 students were not in their scheduled lessons during the inspection. The attendance of sixth-form students is well below average, partly because some students on reduced timetables only attend when they have lessons.

Nearly a quarter of students, including sixth formers, say they only sometimes feel safe. While students know who they can talk to about any problems, less than half

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feel that bullying is usually dealt with well. Too little notice is taken of students' views. A few students raised concerns that racist and homophobic bullying is not always tackled. This was illustrated when a racist incident in one lesson was inappropriately played down by the teacher.

Leadership and management

The academy's original vision was to offer a 'bold new approach to education', with students following personalised programmes within small 'learning zones' designed to encourage a sense of ownership and belonging. This approach has failed: the curriculum is not meeting students' learning needs and the academy community lacks cohesion. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequately developed. In some respects, the new accommodation is not fit for purpose. Using the 'learning zones' as envisaged made it difficult to build strong subject teams, and the academy has now created some subject bases. The scattering of science facilities has led to unsafe arrangements for the storage and preparation of chemicals, risking the well-being of the science technicians. The academy is now addressing this matter. The academy's arrangements for child protection and for vetting staff meet requirements.

The Principal recognises that the academy has many deep-seated problems. Under his leadership, some progress has been made. He is securing support from an outstanding school and developing links with the local authority, though these contacts have had limited impact so far. Attainment, teaching, behaviour and attendance have not improved enough. Changes to the sixth form and Key Stage 4 curriculum are planned for September 2012. The academy is under-going a significant restructuring of personnel in senior positions. The position is fragile because some are very recently in post and their roles and responsibilities are still to be clarified and fully understood. At middle-management level, self-evaluation and action planning are weak, with limited impact on improving teaching and collective planning. There is insufficient use of the most effective teachers to support colleagues to improve. Some subject leaders have little experience of monitoring the work of others, and this contributes to inconsistency in areas like homework and marking. Professional development has not had enough impact in raising the expertise of teachers or managers. In some cases, leadership structures present a barrier. For example, the special educational needs coordinator does not work closely enough with the teaching assistants, who are managed through departments.

Many of the current leadership team have shown a commitment to improve the academy. However, recent changes need time to embed and the inexperience of some staff is shown in their lack of understanding about the respective responsibilities of other senior colleagues. Considerable efforts have been made to drive up attainment measures in the short-term, through intensive intervention with borderline students. However, this work has had insufficient impact on the overall quality of teaching or students' learning. Action on racist and homophobic discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities are inadequate. Although students with disabilities are integrated well, the academy does not adequately

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monitor how different factors such as attendance, bullying, behaviour, curriculum provision and learning support affect the learning and progress of students with special educational needs.

The academy is not demonstrating sufficient capacity to improve. The Academy Trust, working through the governing body, has limited educational expertise to support the academy. Its contribution to leadership and management is inadequate. The many changes at senior level, the failure to deliver on the original vision and the failure to seek professional advice soon enough have all contributed to the present situation. Evaluation by the governing body is not rigorous enough. For example, its response to concerns raised by the Department for Education in January 2012 included assurances that do not match the findings of this inspection.

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 The Basildon Upper Academy, Basildon, SS13 3HL

Following the recent inspection of the academy, it has been judged to be inadequate. The academy had previously been visited a year ago, to check on its progress since being opened. At that time, inspectors raised several concerns. A new Principal started shortly afterwards and took full control in September. You told us that his crackdown on discipline had improved behaviour in lessons, but still more than half of you say that behaviour is only sometimes good. Many of you do not enjoy school and nearly a quarter do not always feel safe. You raised concerns about homophobic and racist bullying and said that your views are not always taken into account. We agree that there are many problems, including low attendance, and we judged behaviour and safety to be inadequate.

Many of you are rightly frustrated by the quality of some of the teaching and the frequent changes of teacher in some subjects. We were concerned to find that some teachers were not expecting you to do enough work, or were giving you work that was too easy or too hard. In some of the vocational courses, we found that you were spending too much time copying information into your assignments that you do not always understand. Although standards in mathematics and English are better than last year, they are still well below the national average. Teaching is not good enough in many of your lessons and as a result, you are not making enough progress.

The new Principal is making changes in the organisation of the academy to provide you with a better curriculum, and also to make it clear what each of the senior and middle leaders is responsible for. However, it is too early for the changes to have made much difference. We judged leadership and management to be inadequate.

The inspection team has made many recommendations for improvement in order to help the academy address these weaknesses. You may like to read them in detail for yourselves in the full report. The academy will be placed in 'special measures' and be visited regularly by inspectors to check on its progress in making improvements. You can all play a part by attending regularly and by trying your hardest. On behalf of the inspection team, I want to thank you for making us welcome and sharing your views with us. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

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