

The Basildon Lower Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135895
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	381954
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	805
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Headteacher	Rory Fox (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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Age group	11–14
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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Additional inspector

Clifford Walker

Additional inspector

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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 39 teachers. They met with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including self-evaluation and improvement plans, lesson monitoring reports, and completed questionnaires from 82 parents and carers, 49 staff and 150 students.

Information about the school

The Basildon Lower Academy opened with the Basildon Upper Academy on the sites of the two predecessor schools in 2009. It is part of the Basildon Academies Trust, sponsored by the Stanton Lane Trust. The lower academy has two 'inner schools', consistent with its original vision. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than that found nationally. Most students are White British; very few are of minority ethnic heritage. The most recent published data confirms that the proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is broadly average. The academy's leaders consider that actual numbers are likely to be higher once an audit of special educational needs is complete. A higher than average proportion, amounting to 28 students, currently has a statement of special educational needs. At its first monitoring inspection in March 2011 the academy was judged to be making inadequate progress. Since then a large proportion of staff have left and a new Principal was appointed to lead both academies in September 2011. The number of students in the academy has fallen from 927 in 2011 to 805 this year. The academy's specialisms are enterprise and mathematics.

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 school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.
- The academy is not satisfactory because students’ achievement, their behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching, and leadership and management are inadequate.
- Attainment is consistently well below average, especially in English and mathematics. Current assessment data indicate that students are beginning to make improved progress in Years 7 and 8, but significant underachievement remains and Year 9 students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are not adequately prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Students’ behaviour is not managed consistently. Expectations of the students’ capabilities are not always high enough so that work is not matched to their different abilities. Insufficient use is made of assessment data to plan lessons. The setting of personal targets and teachers’ verbal and written feedback to students lacks coherence across the academy. Opportunities for students to learn independently or in groups are limited. A focus on encouraging students to read more often is leading to some improvement, but the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills is not well-managed.
- Poor behaviour and below-average attendance are having a detrimental effect on students’ learning and progress. Recent actions to reduce absence are working and attendance is slowly improving. However, this work is undermined by the high proportion of students placed in isolation for poor behaviour or minor misdemeanours. A small minority of students and over half the parents

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and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire expressed their concerns about standards of behaviour.

- The leadership of teaching and management of performance are inadequate. Steps taken following monitoring has reduced the proportion of inadequate lessons but some remain. The Principal's vision to improve practice is not fully shared and understood by all staff due in part to the high number of changes in personnel. Procedures to assess the impact of teaching on students' learning are recent and not embedded. Data are collated by senior leaders but most middle managers and teachers have a limited understanding of their use in raising achievement. The governing body meets its statutory duties. Members were initially ineffective in holding leaders and managers to account for securing improvements quickly enough in the period following the opening of the academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement across the academy by:
 - implementing a systematic programme to teach literacy and numeracy skills to those students who have significant shortfalls in their reading, writing and mathematics attainment
 - increasing managers' and teachers' understanding of how to use assessment data to plan learning and raise achievement
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessments and regular verbal and written feedback on their progress inform students of how well they are doing
 - setting clear personal targets for students and ensuring they are understood and used to raise aspirations and track their progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching, especially that of basic skills, so that it is good by:
 - implementing a clear, coherent plan for improving teaching, based on high expectations and the steadfast commitment of all staff to raise the achievement of all learners
 - providing students with activities that stimulate their interest and enjoyment
 - ensuring teachers' planning includes activities suited to students' different abilities and which enable students to work independently, in pairs and in groups
 - using the information gained from lesson monitoring to tailor specific training and support for teachers, and measuring the impact this has on the quality of provision and students' learning
 - enabling the best teachers to show others what good teaching is and mentor teachers to increase their effectiveness.
- Improve behaviour and attendance by:

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- checking that all teachers apply behaviour management procedures consistently in all lessons
 - ensuring that progressively fewer students are removed from lessons and those that are receive appropriate and timely support which meets their needs and secures their progress
 - ensuring that the new procedures to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence focus closely on disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - significantly reducing the number of students excluded from the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
- articulating a clear vision for the academy and sharing it with all teachers, leaders and managers, students, and their parents and carers to gain their full support and commitment to securing long-term improvements
 - holding all staff to account by measuring the impact of teaching and the actions to improve it on students' learning
 - clearly defining the roles and expectations of all pastoral and academic leaders and managers in raising achievement and regularly checking that they are demonstrating the capacity to secure improvements
 - requiring governors to set the highest expectations of senior leaders and managers, and rigorously managing their performance to raise students' achievement
 - improving the effectiveness of communication systems within the academy and between staff, parents and carers so that important information is shared efficiently and in a timely fashion
 - strengthening the Academy Trust's capacity for educational leadership.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Since the academy's opening, a series of staffing changes, inadequate teaching, poor attendance and a high rate of exclusion have had a detrimental effect on students' learning and progress. Students' attainment on entry to Year 7 is well below the national average. By the end of Year 9 the percentage attaining the expected levels in English and mathematics is low. Similarly, in most foundation subjects, attainment is consistently low. This represents inadequate progress. The academy's specialisms in mathematics and enterprise make little difference to the standards achieved. Disabled students are accommodated well and given additional care and support in lessons, but a high proportion of them and students that have special educational needs underachieve because teachers do not plan work to meet their needs or manage their behaviour well enough.

Current assessment data collated from half-term tests indicate better progress is being made in English and mathematics in Years 7 and 8, and a higher proportion of

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more able students are exceeding national expectations. However, notable underachievement remains in Year 9 where the shortfalls in students' knowledge from previous years have not been fully addressed. When asked, Year 9 students said that they are making better progress in English and to a lesser extent in mathematics this year, mainly because behaviour in lessons has improved. However, they raised concerns about their limited progress in those lessons taught by temporary staff and when they were removed from lessons for minor infringements. Over half of the questionnaires received from parents and carers shared these concerns and one-quarter of the respondents did not feel that their child was progressing satisfactorily.

Observations by inspectors found that nurture groups and the focus on developing students' language skills in humanities lessons are helping to promote students' skills in literacy. This occurs especially when teachers take time to explore the sounds of letters and words, and show how to break them down to spell correctly, but this good practice is inconsistent and lacks coherence across the key stage. One-to-one and group reading led by assistants and volunteers is helping to tackle the low literacy skills of a large proportion of students. Students show an interest in reading with most carrying personal reading material with them in the form of paperbacks. However, in discussion some older students showed little enthusiasm for reading.

Quality of teaching

The poor quality of teaching is preventing the academy from increasing its effectiveness. Senior leaders acknowledge this and parents, carers and pupils rightly have concerns about teaching. Senior leaders' plans to address matters are currently being implemented although actions to address students' behaviour have taken priority. Academy leaders know where good practice lies. Inspectors found pockets of good teaching in physical education, history and art, and on occasions when the teaching of basic literacy fully engages students and accelerates their progress. These lessons are well planned and in them teachers manage behaviour effectively, and make learning challenging and enjoyable, but this good practice has not been fully shared across departments to improve teaching.

Most students are punctual and arrive prepared for learning, but teachers' low expectations and dependence on whole-class teaching of the same tasks lead to boredom and passivity. Classes have been reorganised to enable more able students capable of attaining at least a National Curriculum Level 5 in English and mathematics to study together, but they are not provided with sufficiently challenging work. When the pace of learning slows and work fails to challenge or stimulate their interest, behaviour deteriorates. Inconsistencies in how behaviour is managed allow a minority of students with challenging behaviour to regularly disturb the learning of others. There are too few opportunities for students to learn by themselves or together in groups, and this restricts their progress. These weaknesses show that teaching is not promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development adequately. Few examples were seen of teachers enabling students to think for themselves, communicate their opinions, or instil positive attitudes towards

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their learning or each other.

Teachers' questioning does not engage all learners or check whether all of them have secured a firm understanding. The curriculum does not ensure that work set meets students' needs. Only a few teachers make use of assessment data to plan different learning activities or to target those students needing additional support. Some teachers set targets but these are rarely referred to in their verbal feedback or marking of books, and when asked, Year 9 students had little understanding of what the targets in their books were about.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Inadequate management of behaviour presented a barrier to learning in a quarter of lessons seen by inspectors. Half of the 82 parents or carers who returned the inspection questionnaire felt that lessons are disrupted by bad behaviour. The consequence of continued poor behaviour in lessons is removal into the isolation room. This action and the high proportion of students sent there for a range of minor misdemeanours result in too many of them missing their education. On the first day of the inspection 99 students were removed from lessons.

Most students feel safe in the academy, but they and their parents and carers say that at times cases of bullying are not dealt with effectively. All incidents are recorded and followed up, and most students feel that if they spoke to a member of staff they would deal with the issue appropriately. Attendance has improved due to the actions taken to reduce persistent absence, but overall attendance remains low. A minority of students who have special educational needs are regularly absent from the academy.

Leadership and management

The Principal has taken radical action to provide better quality data, remove some inadequate teaching and address students' behaviour and attendance. He has forged links with local primary schools and fostered a new partnership with the local authority. Other actions, such as the management of teaching and learning, and the use of isolation to manage poor behaviour are not working effectively and require further development. The vision for the academy is unclear and is not fully understood by all, so consequently not everyone is fully supportive of what senior leaders and the governing body are striving to achieve. Senior leaders have set a revised target of 60% for the proportion of Year 9 students expected to achieve Level 5 in English and mathematics. This is properly ambitious, but will prove very challenging against the back-drop of inadequate teaching, poor behaviour and attendance, and a lack of capacity in senior and middle leadership.

Some subject leaders are inexperienced and only a few demonstrate highly effective teaching, or place sufficient emphasis on improving teaching and assessment in their departments. They do not complete formal observations of colleagues' lessons in order to provide specialist advice and guidance on how to improve. Heads of the two

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'inner schools' contribute towards meeting students' pastoral needs, but their roles in monitoring their academic progress are underdeveloped. The way the academy is organised makes little difference to students' overall achievement. Regular lesson monitoring takes place and is beginning to inform tailored training and support for those teachers that need it most. The curriculum is inadequate because it does not prepare students for Key Stage 4 or sufficiently develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Only a small minority of students engage in worthwhile enrichment activities during lunchtimes and after the academy day.

The academy is not demonstrating sufficient capacity to improve. Actions taken by leaders and managers, including members of the governing body have not led to better outcomes for all students. Recent improvements in Key Stage 3 remain fragile and are not firmly established. The Academy Trust, working through the governing body, has limited educational expertise. Its contribution to leadership and management is inadequate, though it meets its responsibilities for safeguarding. The governing body meets regularly and has increased its monitoring of the academy's work, but this has not reversed all of the underachievement noted at the time of the monitoring inspection. The academy is not tackling discrimination or promoting equality of opportunity because so many students are underachieving. A recently established parents' forum is encouraging greater parental involvement, but a high proportion of questionnaires expressed concerns about communication within the academy and the difficulty in contacting academy staff to resolve issues with respect to their children.

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 Lower Academy, Basildon, SS14 1UX

We recently visited your academy to meet with you, join you in lessons and talk with your teachers. Thank you for making us feel welcome. Particular thanks go to the academy council, those who completed our questionnaires and the three groups of students who met with inspectors, especially those who agreed to read aloud to us. You represented your academy well.

We found that your academy needs 'special measures' to improve it because it is not providing you with the education you deserve. We have asked your senior teachers and the governing body to raise your achievement through the actions listed below.

- Make sure you have useful targets and are told clearly how well you are doing and how to improve.
- Check that all your teachers expect the very best from you, provide you with work that is challenging, interesting and enjoyable, and give you lots of opportunities to work together in pairs and small groups.
- Improve your behaviour and attendance so that you behave well and fewer of you are excluded from lessons.
- Gaining the full support of all teachers, students and your parents and carers to improve the academy and make it a really good place to learn.

You all have an important part to play in this by attending regularly, behaving well and trying your hardest. Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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