

Barclay School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117515
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379433
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	Trevor Riddiough HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1133
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Boakes
Headteacher	Debbie Upton
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2009
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

Inspection team

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed 37 lessons taught by 36 teachers, of which 10 were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They also sat in on three tutor groups and two assemblies. Inspectors carried out brief visits to a series of other lessons and held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of students' progress, performance data, students' work, whole-school and subject development plans, numerous policies, school documents, incident logs, and case studies. Completed questionnaires from 177 parents and carers, 117 students and 52 staff were received and analysed.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most students are from White British backgrounds, and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs (including those supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs) is broadly average. The school is a designated specialist technology college. It holds a number of awards including Artsmark Silver and Healthy Schools status. A new headteacher was appointed to the school in September 2011. The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This school provides a satisfactory quality of education for its students. There has been much improvement recently but the school is not yet good because not enough students make the good progress of which they are capable. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. Attainment is rising and is now broadly average. Disabled students and those with special educational needs, as well as students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, all previously made less progress than others. They are now better catered for through early intervention and better individual support. As a result, these gaps in achievement are closing.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Rigorous monitoring and systems for supporting teachers to increase their skills are improving the overall quality of teaching. However, inconsistencies remain in teaching which results in uneven progress across the school.
- Behaviour is satisfactory as students behave well around the school and are generally sensible and considerate. However, students are often passive in their learning during lessons. Attendance in the main school is below average while in the sixth form, it has risen to average levels.
- The sixth form is satisfactory in all areas. Students make satisfactory progress in most courses at AS and A level. In vocational courses of study, students generally make better progress due to effective teaching strategies and course content which are better matched to their needs and interests.
- The headteacher leads by example and is supported by an effective team of senior leaders. There is now a shared vision for how the school should develop further. Actions for improvement are founded on an honest and accurate self-evaluation and effective management of performance. Senior leaders have taken a concerted approach to improving outcomes for students that have already had a marked effect on teaching and behaviour.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment across the school by:
 - ensuring that accurate day-to-day assessment informs teachers' planning effectively and leads to students receiving work which matches their needs and extends their capabilities
 - ensuring students receive support of a consistently high quality from teaching assistants
 - rapidly improving levels of attendance and reducing the proportion of students who are persistently absent from school.

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that marking and feedback in all classes makes clear the steps students need to take to reach their target grades
 - providing more activities in lessons which inspire and engage students fully in their learning
 - encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning and develop their independent learning skills.

- Enhance the impact of heads of department by improving their consistency and effectiveness in driving improvements in teaching and learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students arrive in school with broadly average levels of attainment, while for some, literacy levels are below average. Most parents and carers believe that students are making good progress. Inspectors found that students make satisfactory progress throughout the school and the school's current data show they are now on target to reach levels of attainment that are broadly average. This shows an improvement on recent years when attainment has been below average, particularly in English. The school monitors progress carefully to check for any underachievement and has worked successfully to close any gaps so that all groups make expected progress. In 2011, girls made less progress than boys. However, the gap between the performance of girls and boys has now closed and the data show that they now progress at the same rate. The gap between the progress of students known to be entitled to free school meals and that of similar groups nationally is also closing.

Students' reading, writing and communication skills are often weak on starting at the school and this inhibits students' achievement across the curriculum. The school's leaders are aware of this and have introduced measures to improve levels of literacy and, as a result, achievement is rising in this area.

Satisfactory progress is supported by generally satisfactory teaching in lessons. In the best lessons, resources are used well and tasks are adapted to ensure that most

students are able to make the good progress of which they are capable. Disabled students and those with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress. This is due to the systems used to identify where extra support is needed and the helpful strategies that the school employs to provide it. However, the impact of teaching assistants on student progress is patchy and the school has identified this as a priority for improvement.

Levels of attainment in the sixth form are below average in AS and A level courses, and just above average in applied courses. This represents satisfactory progress from a below-average starting point in the majority of courses, and good progress in the applied subjects. However, attainment is rising. This is the result of closer and more regular monitoring of students' progress and a better match of courses to students' needs and aspirations.

Quality of teaching

School records show that teaching and learning are improving and most lessons are satisfactory with some that are good or outstanding. Responses to the questionnaires from parents and carers were mainly positive, with the majority saying that their children are taught well. Inspectors found that while good teaching takes place, this is not consistent across all subjects in the main school and in the sixth form.

In the best lessons, teachers inspire students to give their best through the use of challenging tasks and stimulating resources, and students are supported well to work independently of their teacher. For example, in a good mathematics lesson the teacher simplified concepts on probability, and provided students with clear approaches to answer more complex problems. Students were allowed to develop their working out in pairs which raised their confidence and enabled them to give their best. In a Year 12 sports lesson, students developed their understanding of increasing participation in sport through a range of activities including video clips, mapping ideas, discussion and probing questioning. These positive features are not, however, universal. While relationships between students and their teachers are mostly good, expectations are not always rigorous enough to secure sustained endeavour from students.

In less effective lessons, tasks are not well-enough matched to students' capabilities and interests to secure the good progress and engagement of all students in the class. Some lessons have too much of a whole-class focus so students do the same work and for some students there is either too much or not enough challenge. Marking does not regularly provide sufficient guidance to students on how to improve their work further. At times teachers over-direct students, reducing their opportunities to work with genuine independence.

Opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are often well developed. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson on character development, students used 'hot-seating' where the teacher and then students role-played a character as a means of exploring and developing empathy. A science lesson in Year 10 successfully developed students' curiosity of nature and the world around them. Training has been provided for all staff to promote the development of literacy

across the curriculum and a useful tool-kit has been produced to support improved reading, writing and spelling. It is too early to determine the full impact of these strategies.

The curriculum is having an increasingly positive impact on learning in all key stages. The wider range of alternative qualifications on offer, including those that are vocational, respond well to the needs and interests of students. The revised curriculum contributes to the positive attitudes of the students and to their engagement in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students overwhelmingly say that they feel safe, a view supported by parents and carers. They were keen to point out that behaviour has improved, but only recently. Parents and carers agree. Comments such as 'behaviour has improved since September with the new strategies' and 'everything is clear now and everyone knows what's happening', illustrate this viewpoint. This recently established positive behaviour results from clear expectations and teachers' firm and effective management of students. The consistency of application and understanding of behaviour strategies has not had time to be consolidated. While good behaviour is a feature of most lessons, positive behaviours such as motivation are not yet common or frequently observed to promote learning. Nevertheless, there are increasing signs that students are taking ownership of their behaviour around the school. As a result, the school is a cohesive and ordered community.

The new systems for managing behaviour are being evaluated and refined. Data show a general downward trend in incidents and exclusions over time. Students say that they are well supported by their teachers and other adults in the school. Students recognise that there is some negative behaviour which affects their learning but say that it is now dealt with rapidly. They report that incidents of bullying are rare and that they know who to turn to when they have a problem. These concerns are dealt with promptly and effectively allowing students to gain in confidence. A recent anti-bullying campaign in the school has prepared students well to understand, prevent and deal with all types of bullying, including racist and cyber bullying. Student mentors are now being trained to provide day-to-day support to those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

Most students arrive punctually and are prepared for the start of lessons. Sanctions exist for those who are frequently late and these have an impact as punctuality has improved over time. Overall attendance levels are below average, while those in the sixth form are average and rising. Attendance is now being monitored closely and interventions are in place to secure the better attendance of targeted individuals.

Leadership and management

The school's mission is made very clear to parents and carers, staff and students and this is universally supported. The headteacher and senior team provide strong leadership that is ambitious in its vision and clearly focused on raising students' attainment. Most of the building blocks for this work are already in place. In a very

short time systems have been introduced to track students' progress closely, to establish a positive climate for learning, to support the development of improved teaching practice, and to enhance the curriculum opportunities for students both in the main school and in the sixth form. The unevenness in the progress of different groups of students is reducing and the school's effectiveness in promoting equal opportunities growing. The impact of these initiatives is yet to be fully realised but there are already signs of success. Heads of department are benefiting from opportunities to lead whole-school development work which builds their confidence and expertise. While their practice is developing, it is not yet consistent across the school.

Arrangements for managing teachers' performance ensure practice develops and contributes fully to raising achievement. Appropriate policies, training and coaching support this development. The governing body is providing challenge and support to the school during this time of rapid change. Governors undertake their statutory responsibilities well; procedures for the safeguarding of students are secure and the school's approach meets statutory requirements. Accountability and high expectations of both staff and students are developing aspects of the school at all levels and these contribute to the increasing capacity for sustaining the improvement that is already taking place.

The planned curriculum is growing in its effectiveness in meeting students' needs and aspirations. It supports their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development well. At Key Stage 3, curriculum changes are designed to increase engagement and the establishment of key skills. The change from vertical tutoring to year group tutoring is designed to enhance the personal development of students further. Learning pathways at Key Stage 4 are carefully mapped to offer appropriate qualifications as well as an improved balance of academic and vocational courses. Adjustments to the curriculum and timetable in the sixth form have reduced the over-long lesson time in some subjects and maximised students' opportunities to gain relevant qualifications and prepare students better for the next stage of their lives. These changes are all designed to contribute to raising attainment levels across the school in the coming years.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



4 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Barclay School, Stevenage, SG1 3RB.

Firstly, thank you for the warm welcome you gave us during the inspection. We found it very helpful to talk to you, look at your work and visit your lessons. You helped us to understand what it is really like to be a student at your school. Inspectors judge that you go to a satisfactory school with a satisfactory sixth form. Your school is clearly improving. Attainment in the past has been below average, but our observations show that it is now rising. You are making at least satisfactory progress in most of your lessons in the main school as well as in the sixth form. We can see that your school is now making strenuous efforts to make improvements, so that you can make better progress in all your lessons.

While your behaviour is sometimes good in lessons, we note that many of you are passive and do not get fully involved in your learning. We have asked the school to work with you to improve this and I know that your headteacher is keen to hear your views so please help her. It was good to see that many of you get involved in the opportunities to help others in school by being student ambassadors. We are, however, concerned to note that some of you are not attending school regularly and this could have an effect on your results.

To help improve your school further, we have asked your headteacher, the staff and the governing body to raise your achievement in all subjects by:

- working with you and your parents and carers to improve your attendance
- improving some aspects of teaching so that you are all challenged to produce your best and that you are able to work more independently of your teachers
- improving the support that you receive from your teaching assistants
- giving you good advice on how to improve your work and reach your targets during your lessons and through the day-to-day marking of your work
- ensuring that heads of department play a full part in improving the quality of teaching in your subjects.

You have a part to play and you can really help your school by attending school regularly, ensuring that you do not settle for anything other than your best and following up the comments and suggestions that your teachers make to help you to improve your work. I wish you all success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Barclay School.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector

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