

Barnwell School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117518
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379435
Inspection dates	30–31 May 2012
Lead inspector	Deborah James

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1437
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Ashley-Wren
Headteacher	Anthony Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2009
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Deborah James	Additional Inspector
Sean Wyartt	Additional Inspector
Caroline Pardy	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector
Isobel Randall	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 50 lessons, including 14 observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team, taught by 50 teachers. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons to look at learning approaches in the sixth form, marking, literacy development and behaviour. Meetings were held with students, senior leaders and other staff and local authority representatives. A telephone conversation was held with the Chair of the Governing Body. 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 the tracking of students' progress, school improvement plans, school self-evaluation documentation and records of attendance and behaviour. They reviewed responses to questionnaires from 255 parents and carers, 150 students and 118 staff.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average-sized secondary school. The school is split across two sites about a mile apart, one serving Key Stage 3 students and the other providing for students in Key Stages 4 and 5. The majority of students are White British. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is slightly above average. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities is 11.1%. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets the minimum expectation for attainment and progress. The school holds a number of awards including Artsmark Gold, the Quality in Study Support and the Centre for Education and Industry award for excellence in enterprise education.

The school has undergone considerable leadership turbulence over the last year and is currently led by an acting headteacher, supported by the local authority and an executive headteacher from another Hertfordshire school for two days a week.

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

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school that provides a supportive and welcoming environment for its students. Students enjoy coming to school and benefit from positive relationships with staff. The school is not yet good because teaching does not ensure that all students make good progress and school leaders have not been sufficiently focused on improving the quality of teaching. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory. Progress in lessons and over time for the majority of students is satisfactory. Attainment has been improving strongly, particularly in the English and mathematics, and is now average. Students do not get enough opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in a co-ordinated way across all subjects.
- Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Much good teaching was seen during the inspection, with teachers challenging and motivating students to make good progress. However, where teaching was less effective, activities were not sufficiently matched to students' individual needs. Marking is inconsistent across the school, with too little guidance for students on how to improve their work.
- Although students display positive attitudes to learning, work well with each other, and the behaviour seen in lessons and around the school during the inspection was good, many parents and carers raised concerns about low level disruption in lessons. Inspectors agree that, over time, behaviour is satisfactory.
- School leaders have a broadly accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, effectively manage the performance of teachers and are committed to raising the achievement of all students. However, a new leadership structure and changes to school review processes have not yet sharply identified the actions required to tackle the uneven progress made by students.

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- The sixth form is satisfactory. Standards in the sixth form fluctuate and remain below the national averages. However, given their starting points, students make satisfactory progress overall.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure students make good progress from their starting points and that by June 2013, at least 70% of teaching is good or better, through:
 - ensuring lessons are planned to provide challenging activities matched to students' different needs
 - making sure that all students receive regular feedback on their work through good quality marking that gives purposeful advice on how to improve and then allows students time to respond to this advice
 - providing co-ordinated opportunities for students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.
- Strengthen the leadership skills of leaders at all levels so that they can take greater responsibility for driving improvement by:
 - developing the school's existing self-review model to focus on the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on students' progress
 - sharing the good practice of the most effective middle leaders so that all department leadership is of a consistently high standard.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 remains broadly average but the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has risen significantly in the last two years. Evidence in lessons, books and from assessment data indicates that students are making progress in line with expectations. Vocational courses have been very successful in raising the proportion of students leaving with five or more qualifications. In general, students in the sixth form reach AS and A level grades below national levels but progress from their starting points is in line with national expectations.

In lessons, students are keen to learn and, when offered suitably challenging activities, they engage enthusiastically, supporting one another and working well independently. Students enjoy opportunities for discussion and practical activities. In a Year 10 science 'super learner day', active teaching methods were used to fully engage students. They said that they valued the day because it gave them the opportunity to share knowledge with their peers, ask questions and ensure they were revising important topics. The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills is supported in some lessons. For example, in a science lesson key terminology and definitions were introduced as a fun bingo-style starter. However, there are no

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school-wide priorities to guide further development in this area.

Some groups of students, in particular, boys, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, made less progress than other groups in 2011. The school has introduced a number of strategies to improve the achievement of these groups. These include changes to the curriculum and more rigorous monitoring of students' performance against their targets, with appropriate interventions for those falling behind. These actions have been effective in reducing the gap between these students and other groups in the current Year 11 and so that they are now making satisfactory progress. The great majority of parents and carers believe that their children make good progress. However, inspection findings do not fully support this view.

Quality of teaching

The great majority of parents believe that teaching is good. Inspectors found that teaching is satisfactory overall with some that is good and instances of outstanding teaching. When teaching is at its best, lessons proceed at a good pace and are planned to meet the needs of all students. In a Year 7 drama lesson, questions matched to students' different needs were pinned to the wall around the classroom so that students could select their level and the degree of challenge; they did so with enthusiasm and ambition. Teachers' questioning is used to explore and develop students' understanding and, in the best examples, students are encouraged to respond to and challenge the opinions of their peers. The most rapid and secure learning occurs when students engage in challenging, motivating tasks that enable them to think independently. This feature was particularly noticeable in sixth form lessons, for example in a Year 13 performing arts lesson in which students were required to take ownership of their own learning in accurately assessing the work of their peers. In all lessons observed by inspectors, there were good relationships between teachers and students. Lessons contributed well to the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development with students demonstrating good co-operative skills, respect for each other and reflective responses. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, students were encouraged to show empathy in their writing by considering life from the point of view of a homeless person.

In satisfactory lessons, teachers often dominate learning time, limiting opportunities for students to practise and develop new skills. Work does not challenge all students and is not well matched to individual needs across the ability range within a class. As a result, students who find the work difficult struggle to get started, and to sustain the pace of learning. Teachers' questions seek responses that are brief or superficial and, as a result, miss opportunities to reshape the learning in lessons to address weaknesses in understanding. These features combine to limit the progress made in lessons and over time.

The quality of marking and feedback varies considerably across the school with a significant amount of marking that is brief and infrequent. The most effective

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marking gives students clear written information about what they have achieved and how they can improve.

The teaching of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is satisfactory. Teachers use their understanding of students' needs to plan effectively and individual support provided by teaching assistants ensures they are able to engage in lessons. However, at times, this support encourages dependency rather than giving students the tools and confidence to complete tasks for themselves.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the inspection, the vast majority of students behaved well in lessons and around the school. They displayed positive attitudes and were polite and courteous to each other and to adults. However, the school is right in judging that behaviour is satisfactory. Responses to the parental questionnaire and discussions with students indicated that, on occasions, the poor behaviour of a few students disrupts learning, especially when teaching does not engage or motivate them. The school has strong evidence that behaviour is improving, including a considerable year-on-year fall in the number of fixed-term exclusions required to address unacceptable behaviour. Bullying logs and behaviour records suggest the number of incidences of bullying have halved between 2010-11 and 2011-12. The school has logged a number of instances of racial bullying, but inspectors are confident that the school acted appropriately to deal with these incidents and has put in place actions to increase students' understanding of all types of bullying. Students expressed a high degree of confidence in how the school deals with bullying. As a result, they feel safe in school and a large majority of parents and carers agree with that. However, parents and carers raised a number of concerns about poor communication from the school on the resolution of bullying issues and inspectors agree that although the school takes bullying seriously, it does not always inform parents and carers of the outcomes of its actions.

Attendance has improved during this academic year for all groups of students, as a result of a number of positive interventions, and it is now broadly average. Recent developments have included a more systematic approach to improving attendance, parental notification by text and focused, multi-agency work. These improvements have led to a decline in the number of students who are persistently absent from school.

Leadership and management

The school is led effectively and senior leaders have the confidence of staff and are driving forward improvements after a period of turbulence in the leadership of the school. The local authority currently manages some areas of governance but it is working closely with the governing body to re-establish full accountability once a permanent headteacher has been appointed. A system of departmental reviews, including lesson observations, work scrutiny and feedback from students, has been in place for a year and has been effective in identifying areas of underperformance.

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These reviews lie at the heart of school self-evaluation and while in some cases they provide senior leaders with information that is sufficiently rigorous to highlight in detail the steps required to improve departmental performance, this is not always the case. Performance management systems are robust and require that staff at all levels are held to account for the progress of students. However, professional development opportunities are not focused sharply enough on enabling satisfactory teachers to improve. All requirements for the safeguarding of students were in place at the time of the inspection. Success in improving attendance, behaviour and achievement in core subject areas are indicative of the school's capacity for further improvement.

Leaders effectively monitor the performance of all groups of students to ensure the school meets its responsibilities in promoting equality and tackling discrimination. The school is working hard to ensure that all students have access to an appropriate curriculum and the support they need to achieve their potential. The curriculum is good because it has undergone significant change over the last few years to meet the needs of all students better, including boys and disabled students and those who have special educational needs. At Key Stage 4, the focus has been on increasing the range of academic and vocational courses to motivate and engage students. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. These aspects of learning are well-embedded in lessons and reinforced through assemblies and in the ethos of the school. The curriculum in the sixth form provides a good range of courses, partly in collaboration with other local schools.

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.



1 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Barnwell School, Stevenage, SG2 9SW

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. Many of you took the time to approach us and talk to us about your school. We enjoyed being in your lessons and reading your responses to the questionnaires.

We found that Barnwell School is a satisfactory school. There is clear evidence of improvement in your achievement, and most of you are making satisfactory progress. You told us you enjoy coming to school, and your attendance is improving. You benefit from positive relationships with staff. Like you, we found that much teaching at Barnwell is good but overall we judged teaching to be satisfactory. This is because the quality of teaching varies considerably and it is not yet supporting you to make consistently good progress.

We found that your school is a safe and orderly place where most students conduct themselves well and are courteous and polite. However, we agree with you that, on occasions, low-level disruption interrupts learning so behaviour was judged to be satisfactory.

We have asked your teachers to help you to make consistently good progress by making some changes to the way they teach including:

- providing you with learning activities that are closely matched to your ability
- marking your work in greater detail and giving you clear suggestions about how to improve
- supporting your literacy and numeracy development in all lessons.

We have also asked the leaders to check the school's work more closely. You all can help by continuing to work hard, attend regularly and behave well. Thank you again for helping us with the inspection of your school. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Lead inspector

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