

Barnfield Vale Academy

Wilbury Drive, Dunstable, LU5 4QP

Inspection dates 16–17 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is good school because

- Standards are rising in reading and mathematics leading to better rates of progress for all groups of students.
- Leaders and managers, driven by the Principal, have created a positive climate where all students can succeed.
- They have brought about improvements to the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- Students with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress.
- Good relationships between teachers and students create a strong family atmosphere where students feel safe and well cared for.
- The calm atmosphere and behaviour around the school is contributing to a climate of high expectations.
- The range and quality of extra-curricular activities, including educational trips, is having a positive impact on students' self-esteem.
- Governors through the academy federation are providing high quality support with access to a good range of training.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding to challenge the more-able students to reach the highest levels of attainment.
- The quality of marking and written comments on students' work does not always help them to understand how to make their work better.
- The quality of writing is not yet good enough. Not enough attention is paid to spelling, punctuation and grammar so that students write more accurately and precisely.
- Attendance is below average. The school has not made clear to all parents the link between coming to school regularly and achieving well.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 20 part lessons across Key Stages 2 and 3. Five lessons were jointly observed with the Principal and members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors met with the Principal, senior leaders, parents, pupils, representatives from the Federation (governing body) and spoke with an officer from the local authority.
- The inspection team scrutinised work across all key stages and looked at the school's internal data for their current groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the views from 26 staff questionnaires and 38 parent responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire on the Ofsted website.)
- Meetings were arranged which explored the curriculum, the provision for special educational needs, subject leadership, pupils' attitudes to school and the use of pupil-premium funding.

Inspection team

Kevin Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Harvey	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy school in March 2011. When its predecessor school, Mill Vale Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- In September 2012 Barnfield Vale Academy became a new academy converter and is part of the Barnfield federation, a federation of a college, a skills college, two secondary schools and one 'free' primary school.
- In September 2013, Barnfield Vale Academy will extend its age range and start to admit children from Reception to Year 4, alongside the present Year 5 to 8 pupils. Over the next few years the school will become a three-form entry primary school and, in addition, continue to provide Key Stage 3 education.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked-after children and other groups, is average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve rates of attendance and reduce persistent absence more rapidly so that they are at least in line with national average by:
 - engaging with parents and carers frequently to make sure they understand the link between attending school regularly and achieving well
 - analysing the reasons why some students are continually absent and taking rapid action to improve their attendance
 - using the Academy Federation structure to promote good attendance and celebrate regularly and publicly those students who attend well.
- Improve teaching so that more of it is outstanding by:
 - revising the whole school marking and assessment policy and making sure that it is applied consistently across the school by checking it more effectively
 - making sure that more-able students are given appropriate challenges to accelerate their progress to reach the higher levels of attainment
 - improving the quality of writing so that students use language more precisely and accurately to communicate their ideas more clearly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- This year, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is well above national expectations. The school's tracking data show that progress per year group has improved over the year since the school became an academy and students achieve well from their different starting points.
- The school's internal data for 2013 continues to show a rising trend of improvement in Key Stage 3. By the end of Year 8 attainment is above expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. This was reflected in lessons observed and in the work seen in books where presentation is good and progress over time sustained
- There is no discernible difference in the achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and other students, as they make good progress.
- Those students known to be eligible for the pupil premium are making good progress. The school uses pupil-premium funding well, targets appropriate additional support effectively and checks the impact of the spending robustly. This means that the attainment gap is closing rapidly this year.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is having a good effect on improving the quality of students' reading and understanding of the written word.
- The quality of writing across the school is not as strong as reading or mathematics. Students are not encouraged to pay enough attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is at least good and sometimes outstanding when the quality of planning is thorough and when resources are well matched to the range of ability. Teachers know their students well and promote a positive climate for learning. Most teachers use data to show how their planning is supporting the range of levels and individual needs in their classes.
 - Good teaching has high expectations where the work is matched to students' starting points so that they can achieve well and move forward at an appropriate pace.
 - At Key Stage 2, good and outstanding teaching uses a variety of activities such as pair work and role play to create different ways for pupils to learn. Students respond well when they are actively engaged in their learning. In a Key Stage 3 drama lesson using the novel 'Holes', pupils created frozen images to show how the characters in the novel had reacted to different situations. Students responded well, showed a good insight into the work they had previously done.
 - In a Year 5 English lesson on poetry, students were challenged with the demands of reading 'The Highwayman'. They explored the vocabulary, the rhyme structure and how the use of technical language created effects. Students responded well to effective teaching which enabled them to understand the poem more deeply. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs also made good progress because the work was well matched to the starting points of each individual student.
 - Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural themes are a strong feature of lessons. Teachers are skilled at drawing out topical issues and promoting interest in a wide variety of moral and social subjects. This is done well in lessons and in some instances is reinforced in 'form time' and through the personal, social and health education programme.
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Lessons are less successful and require improvement when teachers are less confident in their subject knowledge, most notably for more-able students in Key Stage 3. Progress for some students is hampered by a lack of challenge which at times limits achievement.

- Marking varies across the school and lacks precision. Some teachers mark well, using levels and steps for success to show what pupils know and how they can move to the next level, but too many teachers do not mark well enough or set targets for 'next steps'. Too much marking is focused on a grade rather than on having a meaningful comment to support progress and not enough marking identifies errors with corrections.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is good. In lessons students behave well and respond to teachers positively and are courteous. They behave well because they want to do well and succeed.
- At break and lunchtimes students show a mature attitude towards their school. They support each other well and use their time purposefully either playing card games, completing quizzes or taking part in clubs and/or sporting or musical activities. Students use the school grounds with respect, and there are no signs of litter or vandalism.
- Positive behaviour management has had a very good impact on transforming the culture of the school. Individuals are monitored by the 'support block' staff and this has reduced the number of internal exclusions. The school is particularly skilful at managing students who have arrived from other schools and are at the risk of exclusion. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The school's own questionnaire shows that most parents think behaviour is good. This supports the responses to Parent View, although a minority of parents expressed some concern of how the school handles bullying.
- On occasions, when the teaching does not challenge them, some students are rather reticent in lessons and do not always contribute unless directly asked. They do not disrupt but are reluctant to fully engage with their lessons.
- An anti-bullying pupil group was established last year and has now met three times to define what is meant by bullying. This led to a successful assembly showing the different types of bullying and their effects on students' lives. Racist and homophobic incidents are rare and are logged appropriately. The school is effective in challenging prejudices that some students bring to school and this is having a positive impact on shifting some students' views.
- Attendance is below average with persistent absence an area for concern. The school is making every effort to address this with a rigorous monitoring schedule in place. Attendance is monitored termly by a member of the senior team and action is taken when attendance falls below 90%.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and the leadership team have brought about a transformation, supported by the academy federation, in all aspects of the school. There has been rapid improvement in the achievement of students.

- Systems for checking the work of the school are robust. There is now a culture of high expectation and a shared vision. Some parents are still not fully engaged and the school is working to encourage all parents to support the development of the school.
 - Subject leaders are now beginning to shape their role with the support of the senior leadership team. There is a whole-school monitoring calendar which includes subject leaders in 'learning walks', and observing lessons with colleagues. Staff meetings are used well to highlight areas of concern and to address whole-school development issues.
 - The curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils with literacy and numeracy having a high profile. There is additional support for less-able pupils. There is good evidence of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development both through lessons and the wide range of extra enrichment activities. The school promotes equal opportunities for all its students.
 - The Year 8 options, which include opportunities for activities in 'Masterchef', Personal Fitness Training and First Aid, prepare students for life beyond the classroom.
 - The leadership team has focused its efforts on improving achievement and progress for all groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs and those who receive pupil-premium funding. The impact of this has been a steady rise of progress in English and mathematics for most groups of students.
 - The Academy Federation is playing a significant role in developing the quality of all leaders and managers in realising the ambition of its executive team. The systems which are in place offer opportunities to draw on the expertise of other schools within the Federation.
 - Teachers and teaching assistants are benefiting from training.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors through the Barnfield Federation play a strategic role in challenging and holding to account the Principal and senior leaders for the quality of education and the care and safety of its pupils.
 - The governors have a clear understanding of the information about students' progress and attainment and this is shared across the Academy Federation. Governors have a reasonable grasp of the quality of teaching. The governors are fully involved in tackling any underperformance by teachers and take a strategic view of how good teachers are rewarded and how performance is managed.
 - The systems for monitoring evaluation and holding senior leaders to account are robust and provide equal measures of support and challenge.
 - The Federation has oversight of the curriculum, admissions and funding and delegates to the Principal the day-to-day running of the school.
 - Pupil-premium funding is discussed at Federation level, distributed to the school and is reported upon.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138714
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	409372

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non maintained
Age range of pupils	9-13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	396
Appropriate authority	The board of directors
Chair	Jacqueline Webb
Headteacher	Gill Ellyard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01582 523000
Fax number	01582 523010
Email address	g.ellyard@vale.barnfield.ac.uk

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