

The Basildon Lower Academy

Timberlog Close, Basildon, SS14 1UX

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is rising strongly, but standards are not yet high enough, either in English and mathematics or across other subjects.
- Teaching requires improvement because, despite eradicating the most serious inadequacies, some weaknesses and inconsistencies persist.
- In too many lessons the pace of learning is not rapid enough for different groups, including the most able pupils.
- Progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has accelerated in lessons, but is not yet good.
- The curriculum is suitably balanced, but newly introduced subjects do not yet provide sufficient breadth or stimulus.
- The academy has been on a journey from being in special measures, and changes in leadership need more time to impact fully on pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The majority of pupils make good progress in English and the progress they should in mathematics, often from low starting points. Pupils' basic literacy skills are strongly promoted across different subjects.
- The Interim Executive Principal has skilfully steered the academy's recovery and galvanised staff at all levels to work as a team.
- Consistent and effective day-to-day management has transformed the climate of the academy, both in and outside lessons.
- The pupils behave well and feel safe. Most have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed.
- Improvements in teaching are well led. This enables the academy to effectively implement whole-school initiatives to strengthen provision.
- There are clear systems for checking the quality of the academy's work, so that improvement can be sustained.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed 20 lessons, taught by 20 different teachers, many of which were observed jointly with the senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including those relating to safeguarding, pupils’ progress, attendance, exclusions, and the academy’s self-evaluation and its systems for managing teachers’ performance and improving teaching and learning.
- Inspectors took account of the 60 responses from parents to the online Parent View survey. They also evaluated parental responses collated by the academy.
- Discussions were held with the Interim Executive Principal, Head of Academy, nominated staff, several groups of students, two external consultants and two representatives from the Academy Trust, including the Chair of the Governing Body.

Inspection team

Paul Brooker, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Judith Gooding	Additional Inspector
Claire Austin-Macrae	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The Basildon Lower Academy opened in September 2009, at the same time as The Basildon Upper Academy. Although separate schools, the academies share some administrative functions and key leadership roles, including governance, as part of the Basildon Academies Trust.
- The Interim Principal was appointed in November 2012.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The roll has fallen significantly since the academy opened, but numbers are increasing quite significantly through in-year admissions.
- Most students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- Around half of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government to support pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care), which is significantly higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below the national average, but the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Four pupils currently attend alternative provision (education provided by other schools or colleges), at Circles Farm, for up to three days a week.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching so that it is consistently good with more that is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that work is suitably difficult, particularly for the most able pupils
 - improving the pace of learning in lessons, with less time-consuming reviews, so that all pupils are more fully involved from start to finish
 - ensuring that all pupils make good progress in lessons, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Embed the development of the new curriculum, particularly in the humanities subjects and performing arts, so that:
 - pupils are better prepared to choose and study subjects at Key Stage 4
 - pupils can deepen their subject-specific knowledge and skills and develop their wider skills and interests are developed
 - opportunities are seized to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The quality of learning is often good. Pupils make rapid gains when teaching is lively and engaging but they do not learn well across all subjects. Progress was seen to be rather slow in several lessons, particularly when teachers did not plan sufficiently demanding work for all pupils, including the more able.
- Disabled pupils, and those who have special educational needs, achieve significantly better than previously, but the progress made by pupils on school action plus is uneven.
- Pupils attending off-site provision, make similar rates of progress to their peers. The same is true for pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding. At the start of Year 7, the standard of their work is up to six months behind their peers in English and mathematics. The academy's tracking data shows that this gap starts to close by the end of Year 9, but their achievement is not rapid enough to be judged good.
- Despite improvements in pupils' rates of progress, the academy recognises that standards need to increase, and that improving pupils' reading and writing is central to this. The accelerated reader programme has been a notable success. More generally, the impact of the academy's focus on reading can be seen in the five-fold increase in books borrowed from the library, and on a daily basis, the pupils' confidence when reading in class.
- The academy's assessment information indicates that, overall, pupils make good progress in English and expected progress in mathematics. The Year 7 'catch up' funding is used effectively to support specific interventions that help to close the attainment gap for pupils whose levels of reading and writing are well below age-related expectations. Nonetheless, these often-low starting points mean that overall standards at the end of Year 9 remain below what might be expected nationally in both English and mathematics.
- Inspection evidence confirms that pupils make good progress in reading and writing, and that standards in English are rising quickly. Good learning and progress was seen in the majority of English and mathematics lessons observed, and also in pupils' written work. Literacy is well supported across other subjects.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching has strengthened considerably since the last inspection. Weaknesses have been addressed. Typically, lessons are well structured, purposeful and skilfully managed, but the pace of learning varies markedly between different subjects.
- Teachers usually make sensible use of assessment information to pitch work at the right level, and to explain to pupils how they can achieve a better standard. However, some lessons require improvement, for example when the planned activities are not demanding enough for the more-able students, or adapted for pupils with particular learning needs. Teachers sometimes spend too long explaining or exploring levels instead of extending pupils' learning.
- Teachers work hard to nurture positive attitudes, and the best teaching makes full use of this to engage every pupil and demand hard work. When given the opportunity to work together in pairs or small groups, pupils enjoy exchanging ideas and are prepared to draw their own conclusions.

- Teaching is often good, but rarely outstanding because the pace of learning too often lacks urgency. When teaching is less effective, and in some instances still too weak, lessons are characterised by too much teacher-talk. This limits the time for practical activities. Although the quality of questioning is often good, some teachers put too much emphasis on question and answer sessions, rather than getting pupils to work things out for themselves.
- Marking has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are precise about what has been achieved and how work can be improved. Pupils are beginning to respond more routinely to this guidance.
- The work of additional adults is now much better planned. In one lesson, the teaching assistant worked seamlessly with the teacher and skilfully led the start of the lesson with a review of pupils' prior learning. Teaching assistants now understand the particular needs of the pupils that they support so that they are able to steer their learning effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The pupils embrace the academy's maxim 'aspire, believe and achieve'. Ambitious academic and personal targets ensure that low expectations are a thing of the past; pupils are expected to aim high and their self-esteem is carefully nurtured so that, regardless of their ability, all believe that they can be successful. Pupils are quick to point out how good the academy is and what they enjoy, rather than complaining about things they dislike, as was the case previously.
- The academy has addressed the poor behaviour and low levels of attendance which previously had such a detrimental effect on pupils' achievement. Attendance over the last academic year rose almost four percentage points to approach the national average. School exclusions, which were previously exceptionally high, have all but disappeared over the last six months.
- The consistent approach to behaviour management ensures that pupils conduct themselves well, including at break and lunch times, and sanctions are infrequently used. The vast majority of pupils respond to the academy's high expectations and behave well. Those that find this difficult are well supported so that they learn to cope and do not fall behind.
- In lessons, pupils settle quickly, follow instructions and sustain their concentration. Most have positive attitudes to learning and are increasingly proud of their achievements. They take care with their work and are happy to help one another when working in pairs or groups.
- Pupils, including those attending alternative provision, say that they feel well supported and safe. They know about different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and say that it is rare. Pupils are encouraged to sign an anti-bullying pledge. They know who to turn to if they have concerns.
- The academy positively fosters personal responsibility and mutual respect, both between pupils and also with adults. Pupils readily take on responsibilities and are motivated by the academy's rewards. Year 9 pupils have risen to the challenge of being academy ambassadors and look ahead to the Upper Academy with self-confidence.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers, including governors, are ambitious for the academy, and communicate

their high expectations. However, it is the skill and decisiveness of the Interim Executive Principal that has focused and galvanised the work of the staff and governors and brought about such rapid improvement.

- The Interim Executive Principal has balanced well the need to delegate responsibility to senior and middle leaders, while also modelling her expectations and personally leading training. Her ability, alongside the Head of Academy, to hold senior and middle leaders to account has made them into an effective team and meant that important changes have been made quickly.
- When the academy was last inspected, achievement, teaching, behaviour, leadership and management were all inadequate, but this is no longer the case. The academy enjoys a calm and positive climate and is a welcoming place for pupils to learn. This transformation has been brought about by the insistence on high standards of behaviour and consistent day-to-day management, led by the Head of Academy.
- Improvements in teaching are well led. Senior leaders regularly check teaching and have an openly diagnostic approach so that best practice is shared. Teachers reflect on how they can improve their own performance, and support is tailored to the individual needs of staff. The governing body has ensured that the academy's system of performance management is effective. Currently, fewer than one in three teachers is on the upper pay scale, and salary progression is linked closely to pupils' progress.
- The academy has developed a range of strategies to engage parents and improve communication, including a parent forum. Parental attendance at review days is excellent. Recent responses on Parent View reflect much more positive views. The academy's own surveys show that parents are highly positive about its work.
- Procedures for checking the academy's work are effective because evaluations quickly inform planned actions. Leaders make good use of internal reviews and external audits to strengthen provision. A recent review of provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs highlighted weaknesses, which were immediately addressed.
- Since the last inspection, the academy has focused sensibly on meeting pupils' most immediate needs, particularly in regard to raising standards in literacy and in mathematics. Recent changes to the curriculum have widened provision, for example in humanities and performing arts subjects, but schemes of work lack detail on specific skills, knowledge and understanding.
- The academy has introduced a range of initiatives to widen pupils' horizons and enrich their learning experiences, including a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. Pupils, for example, have worked with an author, an illustrator and on a national mathematics challenge. These opportunities stimulate the pupils' creativity and help to boost their expectations of what they can achieve.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted through the curriculum and in assemblies. Pupils readily discuss challenging moral and social issues in lessons, and showed genuine interest in the assembly that celebrated cultural diversity. Moral, spiritual and social issues are tackled in religious education, but opportunities for debate and reflection are not sufficiently planned in other new curriculum subjects.
- The additional government funding provided through the pupil premium has been suitably allocated to secure better achievement for targeted pupils and to ensure equality of opportunity for all. The academy assigns much of the expenditure to salary costs of key staff who provide support, enrichment or work on improving pupils' attendance. Spending is also allocated to

secure the engagement of pupils who might otherwise be excluded from trips and wider enrichment opportunities.

- The academy makes very good use of external support, drawing on the expertise, experience and advice from other schools and consultants, including from the local authority. This guidance has helped to model best practice, moderate the academy's assessments in English and mathematics, and strengthen its leadership.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has strengthened considerably since the last inspection, and is fulfilling its role effectively. Underpinning this improvement is extensive training for governors, the recruitment of highly effective individuals and a more equitable distribution of workloads. However, the main reason for governors working more effectively to support and challenge the academy lies in the fact that they are now far better informed, and therefore in a position to question and challenge senior leaders. A programme of visits enables governors to check for themselves the information provided by the academy and to hold leaders to account by asking timely and searching questions.
- The governing body understands its responsibilities in regard to safeguarding and it ensures that arrangements meet all statutory requirements. Governors know about the quality of teaching, how performance management is used to strengthen teaching, and how effectively the funding from pupil premium is allocated.

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	135895
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	424266

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	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	519
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Principal	Bev Bell
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Fax number	01280 551209
Email address	admin@basildonacademies.org.uk

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