

Barnwell School

Collenswood Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 9HQ

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students' achievement has not been good enough for some time, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Students with special educational needs supported at school action plus achieve less well than similar students nationally.
- Students eligible for pupil premium achieve less well than their peers, although their progress is accelerating.
- Some teachers set pupils work that is too easy or too hard. Variation in the quality of marking means that some students get better support in how to improve than others.
- A small proportion of teaching is hindered by low-level chatter in lessons which is not dealt with effectively.
- The quality of middle leadership is not yet consistently good.
- Although senior leaders recognise what needs to be done to improve the school, some of the initiatives are too recent to have had a full impact.
- The sixth form requires improvement. There is too much variation in outcomes across subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards, including in English and mathematics, are showing signs of improvement across all year groups.
- Students who have a statement of special educational needs achieve well in the school.
- Students say they feel safe in school and their behaviour around the school is generally good. Students' attendance is improving.
- The proportion of effective teaching is steadily increasing.
- Alternative offsite provision is securing positive outcomes for students.
- Senior leaders have put the right things in place to raise standards in the school. They have the support of staff and the governing body. Consequently, this is an improving school.
- The sixth form provision for vocational courses is effective.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors saw 34 parts of lessons taught by 34 teachers, in some cases accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors visited a number of lessons for a shorter period of time to focus on the progress of specific groups of students.
- Meetings took place with the headteacher and other senior leaders, heads of subject areas, different groups of students chosen by the inspection team, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation provided by the school including self-evaluation materials, monitoring information and the single central record of recruitment checks on staff. They also carried out an in-depth scrutiny of students' books, including in English and mathematics.
- At the time of the inspection, students in Year 11 and in the sixth form were sitting practice examinations, although observations of teaching did include these year groups.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents and carers, 81 of whom responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took into account the views of staff by considering 41 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard White	Additional Inspector
June Cannie	Additional Inspector
Stuart Gray	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Barnwell School is larger than the average-sized secondary school and the majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The school currently operates on two sites which are about 1 mile apart, with Years 7 to 9 on the Middle Campus, and Years 10, 11 and the sixth form on the Upper Campus. The headteacher took up his post in November 2012.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, those with parents in the armed services and for children known to be eligible for free school meals, is broadly average.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special education needs and are supported through school action is below average. An above-average proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs attend the school.
- The school offers two specially resourced provisions for students with special educational needs. These cater for five students who are visually impaired and for nine students with specific learning difficulties.
- Post-16 provision is part of a consortium arrangement with The Nobel School, Marriotts School and The Barclay School.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend off-site provision. Providers include North Herts Education Support Centre and North Herts College New Approaches.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have equally high expectations of what students can achieve
 - making sure lessons take account of students' needs and capabilities
 - ensuring that all teachers' marking is consistently helpful in moving students up to the next level of attainment.
 - making sure that all teachers check regularly on students' progress
 - using every opportunity to develop students' literacy skills
 - eliminating any remaining low-level disruptive behaviour.
- By improving teaching, ensure that the proportions of students making expected progress, and the proportions exceeding expected progress in English are closer to or above national figures, including for those supported at school action plus.
- Improve the quality of teaching in the sixth form, by making sure it is challenging and develops their ability to think for themselves across all subjects.
- Strengthen leadership at middle level so that these leaders become fully accountable for the quality of provision within their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' achievement is not good because they do not make enough progress from their below-average starting points. While students' progress in mathematics and science is improving, their progress in English remained static for too long.
- The school's current information on students' achievement in English, coupled with observations of teaching and inspectors' scrutiny of students' books now shows that progress in English is accelerating more quickly.
- The majority of parents and carers believe that their children are making good progress at the school. The school's systems for tracking students' progress indicate that students are progressing at a quicker rate than in the past. This view is supported by inspectors who spoke with students, looked at their work and observed their learning.
- Students who are supported through school action or who have a statement of special educational needs make better progress from their different starting points. Those supported through school action plus achieve less well.
- In 2013 attainment in English and mathematics for students known to be eligible for the pupil premium was around three quarters of a grade lower than their classmates in English and one grade lower in mathematics.
- The gap in attainment between students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and others in the school is closing as their progress is improving. This is because school leaders are becoming more effective at promoting equality of opportunity, fostering good relations and tackling discrimination.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium (extra funding to support those pupils who did not achieve a level 4 in reading and/or mathematics at Key Stage 2) has been used effectively to provide additional support to identified students. Activities have included a Year 6 summer school, the setting up of a separate teaching group in Year 7 and the purchase of a commercial scheme to promote reading.
- Students who attend offsite provision achieve well to gain qualifications in construction, hair and beauty, vehicle maintenance and life and living skills. Consequently, they develop the necessary skills which prepare them for the next stage in their lives.
- Students taught in the two specialist resourced provisions achieve in line with their peers.
- The school operates an early-entry policy for GCSE in mathematics. Higher attaining students have made good progress as a result of this.
- Students in the sixth form make average progress overall. However, progress is stronger for those following vocational courses. Students' achievement remains too variable. They achieve well in drama and media studies but less well in psychology, photography and product design.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View believe teaching is good. Inspectors saw some good and outstanding teaching, as well as teaching which requires improvement. They saw no teaching that was inadequate.
- The quality of teaching is not yet securing good outcomes for all students. This is because in lessons where teaching requires improvement, students do not concentrate as well as they could, chatter in the background and are not engaged in their learning. Some teachers continue to attempt to teach rather than stop this chatter.
- In the better lessons, teachers have high expectations and make full use of information on students' starting points to plan for everyone's needs, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, and those who are higher attaining.
- In an effective English lesson where students discussed whether people were born evil, the teacher directed more-able students to argue both sides of the argument. Such planning is less-well developed where teaching is weaker.
- Teachers' skills in using questions to deepen pupils' understanding is too variable. Where it is particularly weak, teachers do not give students enough thinking time before providing the answer themselves. They do not check regularly that students understand what they are being taught.

The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. Where marking is at its best, teachers' comments are detailed and help students move up to the next level of attainment. Teachers of history and modern foreign languages do this well. Inspectors found that the quality of marking varied within and across subject areas.

- Some subject departments are better at promoting students' development of literacy and mathematical skills than others. Inspectors saw good use being made of literacy skills in the teaching of French and German through the use of literacy prompts on every desk, to which teachers made constant reference.
- The many teaching assistants in the school have different line managers, depending on their role, and some managers are more effective than others. Where teaching assistants are most effective in the classroom they have been involved in the planning of the lesson and help students to understand for themselves how they can achieve the aims of the lesson.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable which results in outcomes that are inconsistent across subjects. Inspectors saw teaching which challenged students, but also saw some which did not sufficiently develop their ability to think and work things out for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Over one third of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire expressed concern about students' behaviour in the school. Inspectors saw students being generally well behaved in lessons. Where attitudes were less positive in lessons, this was often linked to the quality of teaching.
- There are few recorded incidences of bullying. Students told inspectors bullying does happen but that they are taught how to deal with it in school. They are confident that if they report any

bullying to an adult, it will be dealt with effectively.

- Students told inspectors they feel safe in school. The quality of lunchtime supervision is variable in the Middle Campus and senior leaders have increased their presence to tackle this.
- Punctuality to lessons is improving but inspectors saw quite a few teachers having to move students on to their next lesson at lesson change over.
- The proportion of fixed-term exclusions has fallen in 2013. Some students with challenging behaviour are taught separately from the rest of the school between 2.00pm and 5.00pm. This has improved the quality of provision for those who display more positive attitudes.
- The appointment of an attendance officer has helped to increase students' attendance so that it has recently reached the national average.
- Students who are at risk of underachieving or who have challenging personal circumstances are supported well. Case studies of these students made available to inspectors, and subsequent discussions with these students, support the school's belief that these students feel as equally valued as others in the school.
- Students are offered a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Inspectors met with a group of School Ambassadors in Year 10 whose views are sought on how to improve the quality of teaching.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well in lessons and through a range of additional activities including excursions and after-school clubs.
- The promotion of equal opportunities has a high profile in the school. Leaders monitor the performance of different groups of students well to ensure gaps in attainment between them are steadily closing.
- Students in the sixth form told inspectors they enjoy life in the sixth form and they receive sound guidance on how to apply to higher education. They are provided with many opportunities to develop their skills including first aid and mentoring younger students.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The headteacher has used his first year in post wisely to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school. He has more than halved the number of senior leaders, and has matched their roles to areas of expertise. There are many new initiatives and some have not yet had time to have a full impact.
- New leaders have recently been appointed where there have been weaknesses in middle leadership in the past. These leaders are starting to demonstrate impact in raising standards in their subject areas. However, not all middle leaders are sufficiently focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and there is some inconsistency in the way they hold their teams to account and meet the requirements of their job descriptions.
- Staff in the school are very supportive of the new headteacher and other senior leaders, and are confident that the split-site nature of the school is not resulting in weaker communication.

- The headteacher has a sound understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school. Displays on the school's walls raise students' awareness of the importance of achieving well and its link to improved attendance. Inspectors agree with all aspects of the school's self-evaluation summary document.
- Pupil premium funding is being better used this year to improve outcomes for those who are eligible. Successful strategies include the setting up of an alternative curriculum for a group of boys in Year 9, developing learning activities for more-able students and the provision of additional small group work.
- The management of teaching is improving and the proportion of good and better teaching is increasing. Weaker teaching is being tackled well. Inspectors agreed with all of the judgements on teaching made by senior leaders during lessons which were jointly observed.
- The choice of subjects offered to students is broad, and suitable alternatives are offered to those students who are unable to follow a full package of subjects. Leaders have increased the number of lessons in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 to tackle weaknesses in literacy and improve students' outcomes.
- Teachers' performance is managed better and only effective teaching is rewarded with progression up the pay scale.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are improving. Entry requirements for the sixth form are more rigorous and the attendance rate is high. However, improvements in leadership have not yet impacted sufficiently on students' outcomes.
- The local authority demonstrates a good understanding of what the school needs to achieve to deliver a good quality of education. It has produced a well-written support plan which aims to raise standards. Good use has been made of a specialist consultant in English to support the teaching of this subject.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors acknowledge their weaknesses in the past and are now making an effort to develop their understanding of their role in supporting the school to become more effective. They have better access to key information on students' achievement and are starting to present an appropriate balance of challenge and support to school leaders. They have restructured their committees and plan to make visits to the school to pursue their lines of enquiry including standards in English, outcomes for students who receive pupil premium funding and low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons. They receive regular reports on the quality of teaching, and management of teachers' performance, which informs decisions as to whether or not they progress up the pay scale. They know what the school is doing to tackle any underperformance. Governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements are in place, and that statutory requirements are met.

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	117518
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	429993

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Maintained
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	1334
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Ashley-Wren
Headteacher	Anthony Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	30 May 2012
Telephone number	01438 222500
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