

Barclay School

Walkern Road, Stevenage, SG1 3RB

Inspection dates

11–12 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		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

- Too few students gain the higher grades they are capable of in key GCSE subjects.
- Attainment in English, though improving, is below average.
- The quality of teaching varies too much. The use of marking and questioning vary between subjects and teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for students to practise what they have been taught.
- The small proportion of disabled students and those who have complex special educational needs, and students who speak English as an additional language do not receive the support required to help them to achieve well.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Too few students gain the highest grades at A level.
- The gap in achievement between students eligible for the pupil premium and their peers remains too wide.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and other senior leaders are relentless in the pursuit of high standards. Their insight, energy and determination have helped to deliver rapid and considerable improvement. Examination results improved sharply in 2013 at GCSE and A level.
- Governors use their detailed knowledge of the school to support and challenge leaders. They are helping to drive improvements in teaching and accelerate students' progress.
- The school encourages students to behave in ways that maximise their learning. Attitudes to learning are good and students are ambitious to achieve their academic targets.
- Teachers are starting to use information about students' progress to plan swift support for those in danger of falling behind. As a result, fewer students are underachieving.
- Senior leaders evaluate teaching rigorously and provide support to improve practice. As a consequence, teaching is improving strongly and the proportion of lessons where teaching is good or better has increased.
- Students' social and moral development are promoted particularly well and have a positive impact on the school as a community in which students feel safe and valued.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons or parts of lessons. There were six joint observations with senior school leaders. Inspectors also visited an assembly and made short visits to form periods.
- Meetings were held with various senior and subject leaders, teachers, and with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. An inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Students' views were sought during lessons and break times. Inspectors also met with four groups of students and scrutinised their work in a number of subjects.
- Inspectors analysed the school's own parent surveys, 84 responses to the online, Parent View, questionnaire and 67 staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included the school's data on students' current achievement and progress, policies, and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors also looked at documents used by school leaders, including governors, to check standards and evaluate the school's work.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ian Middleton

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional Inspector

Jackie Jackson-Smith

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils) is below average.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, is broadly in line with that found nationally.
- Collaborative arrangements for sixth form provision are in place, involving other secondary schools in Stevenage.
- A small proportion of students in Year 10 and Year 11 access full-time off-site provision at Education Support Centres in Stevenage, Letchworth and Hitchin.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to enable all students to make at least the nationally expected levels of progress, and gain the highest grades they are capable of, including in English, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan work at the right level for students
 - use students' progress information to check the impact of teaching regularly, particularly upon those students who are supported by the pupil premium
 - use questioning strategies, already evident in the best lessons, to encourage students to develop their ideas and find things out for themselves
 - encourage sixth form students to complete reading and other research in advance of lessons so they can engage better in discussions and debates during their taught periods
 - offer students regular feedback that shows them how to improve their work
 - correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors when marking work
 - help students to practise what they have been taught more .
- Ensure that the small proportion of disabled students and those who have complex special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language, make progress in line with their peers, by ensuring teachers and others who support their learning:
 - can access information about individual students that will help when planning their learning
 - receive any training they need to understand the best ways to meet these students' personal and learning needs
 - monitor the progress of individuals regularly and update learning plans as required
 - help senior leaders to review all aspects of these students' current provision.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students do not make as much progress as they should and too few of the most able gain the highest GCSE grades. Although students' attainment has improved over the last three years to reach national averages in many subjects, this does not represent good progress in relation to students' starting points.
- Attainment and progress in GCSE mathematics have been in line with and, sometimes, above the national level over recent years. In 2013, more students gained the highest two grades. Most students currently in school are making better progress than that expected nationally in this subject.
- Students do not make enough progress in English. The proportion making the nationally expected rate of progress increased in 2013 following action to raise standards, but still remained below the national level. Significant further improvements to provision have had a positive impact on the rates of progress being made by most students currently in school.
- The school has followed a policy of not allowing or encouraging students to sit any of their GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11. This has helped more students to gain the highest grades in mathematics.
- The school has used additional Year 7 catch-up funding to give those who had not reached the expected level in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 additional support via 'catch-up classes'. Monitoring of this group indicates these students are progressing well.
- The gap between the attainment of those eligible for the pupil premium and that of other students is narrowing but remains too wide. In 2013, only 38% of these students gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics compared with 61% of their peers.
- Achievement for most disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly in line with expectations. However, a small number of students with more complex needs are not making as much progress as they should, and neither are the few who speak English as an additional language. The school has not reviewed the progress of these groups of students as closely as it should in relation to their specific needs.
- Most of the students who attend courses off-site develop positive attitudes to learning, achieve an English and mathematics qualification, and progress to further education, training or employment.
- Attainment in the sixth form requires improvement because not enough students gain the highest grades at A level. The school is successful in helping those who join the sixth form without at least a grade C in English or mathematics to achieve these qualifications by the time they leave. The proportion of students who complete their A-level courses is in line with the national average; the proportion who go on to university has increased in recent years. All students who leave school at age 18 complete some form of education or training afterwards, or gain employment. In 2013 the proportion of students gaining the highest grades at AS level, and grades A* to C at A level, increased considerably but there was a decline in the proportion of A* and B grades awarded.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teachers do not always use information about students' progress to plan activities that provide the correct level of challenge for different groups of students. In some lessons, all students complete the same activities, or have insufficient time to work on an activity before having to move on. These situations limit their learning. Not all teachers consistently check students' work and ensure mistakes are corrected in spelling or in punctuation.
- Increasingly, teachers make sure that students respond to clear and helpful feedback on their work that makes clear how they can improve further. This is not yet consistent practice within or between all subject areas.
- The school's revised 'behaviour for learning' policy is encouraging students to take responsibility and participate more in the classroom. Monitoring indicates that most students are responding and making more progress as a result. In a small number of lessons, significant minorities progress at a slower rate than their peers.
- Where teaching is good, teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and planned activities are highly engaging. Students are challenged through questioning that helps them develop their ideas and extend their understanding. Students enjoy presenting their answers or ideas to their peers. In an economics lesson, this technique allowed the teacher to spot areas of confusion, challenge the more-able students to correct them, and keep the pace of learning brisk.
- In a small proportion of lessons, more-able students either complete the same work as all other students, or are given extra work that is no more difficult than the previous task they have completed. In these lessons their progress is less rapid than it could be.
- Teachers make it clear to students the purpose of lessons and what they are aiming to achieve. Students benefit from seeing examples of high-quality work from other students. This gives them the confidence that they can reach the more challenging targets that they are generally being set. However, in a minority of lessons, too many students engage in activities that are insufficiently demanding and teachers' questioning does not challenge them enough. During the inspection, the more-able students who were interviewed suggested one in five of their lessons could be characterised in this way.
- In most subjects teachers effectively explain what specialist vocabulary means and use it when they talk to students. This encourages students to use the correct language in their written work and helps them to understand what examination questions require them to do.
- The school is providing extra help so that students who start school finding reading difficult catch up quickly. Many students have engaged with the school's 'reading for pleasure' scheme.
- In the sixth form, most teachers use information about the progress students have already made to plan engaging activities. In most lessons, teachers use questioning to check understanding and to encourage students to develop their ideas and explanations. Relationships are positive and students are keen to engage in discussion and debate and support each other in their learning. Teaching requires improvement because teachers do not always encourage students to practice and develop skills on their own. This makes them unnecessarily reliant on their teachers and slows down the rate at which they acquire new knowledge and skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are keen to learn and reach their challenging targets.
- In most lessons, students are keen and answer questions, participating in discussions, working with others, or demonstrating their answers or ideas to their peers. In a Spanish lesson observed during the inspection, students worked together enthusiastically and offered each other feedback, which included suggestions about how they could improve their work further.
- Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and effort. They respond quickly if students show signs of distraction in lessons and so the pace of learning is only very rarely slowed by poor behaviour. Students cooperate with staff and each other well. Collaborative learning is a strength and is accelerating students' progress.
- A few parents expressed concerns about behaviour. However, inspection evidence supports the view of the great majority that students behave well. Students commented that behaviour has improved considerably since the introduction of a new rewards-and-sanctions system designed in consultation with the students themselves.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View, and staff who completed the questionnaire, believe the school is a safe environment. Students supported this view during the inspection.
- Students are aware of different forms of bullying. They report that it is rare and that the school responds effectively when it does happen. Cyber-bullying has been reduced following a ban on the use of mobile devices during the school day. Students report that homophobic and transgender bullying is rare; this is supported by the school's own records that also demonstrate that racial incidents are seldom. The school has helped students understand how to use the internet safely through assemblies, lessons and contributions from outside agencies.
- School leaders monitor attendance rates of different groups of students carefully and strategies used to reduce absence have had particular impact upon the attendance of pupil premium students and those who are vulnerable. The school has taken steps to help parents understand the impact of absence on learning. It is starting to use fixed-penalty fines to underline the importance of regular attendance.
- Most students are proud of their school and the opportunities it offers them. Many develop their leadership skills by serving on committees, mentoring others or by organising fundraising for charities. Students report to the governing body and are involved in the recruitment of staff and the shaping of new school policies and procedures.
- Behaviour and safety are not yet outstanding because the behaviour of a small minority of students is only managed by staff vigilance, particularly at break and lunchtime.
- Sixth form students behave responsibly. This is evident in the support they offer to younger students, their willingness to accept positions of responsibility, and their attitudes to private study and work in the classroom. Most of the activities undertaken by sixth form students are school based, however; evidence of students' engagement in community or vocationally related work is more limited.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's leadership is promoting rapid school improvement. She is determined that all students and staff will realise their potential as learners and citizens. This sense of ambition is now shared by all senior leaders, who know what to do in order to bring about improvement and who are relentless, strategic and imaginative in their pursuit of it.
- Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the overwhelming majority of staff, students, and parents believe that the school is well led and managed and that recent changes have had considerable positive impact. This view is supported by the school's survey evidence.
- School leaders are far from complacent and are honest about what still has to be achieved. Recent key leadership appointments have helped to drive up standards in areas, such as English, where there has been recent underperformance. Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the impact of subject leadership remains too variable.
- Senior leaders have taken steps to improve the quality of subject leadership and to ensure leaders and teachers monitor students' performance and provide support when necessary. This is beginning to have a positive impact on rates of progress across year groups in key subjects. However, checking the impact of teaching on those students eligible for the pupil premium is not thorough enough.
- Senior leaders have been driving improvements in the quality of teaching across the school. By observing lessons, checking the quality of students' work and teachers' feedback they are able to intervene quickly with support and training when teaching is not good enough. This is helping to increase the proportion of good teaching across the school.
- Teachers' pay is linked to the performance of students. The school's performance management arrangements also reward teachers who share their expertise with others and enable them to improve. Senior leaders are starting to ensure that individuals receive tailored support to help them improve aspects of their teaching.
- The school is sharply focused on ensuring equality of opportunity for students. This is evident in the good quality of information, advice and guidance given to meet students' different needs and aspirations. Systems for regularly checking on the progress of individuals and of groups of students usually ensure that anyone who falls behind is identified quickly. Staff are beginning to work together to plan the support they provide to such students.
- The school is using the pupil premium to fund additional help for such students so that they get back on track quickly. Senior leaders meet with individual students and their parents to ensure they are targeting pupil premium resources more effectively than has previously been the case, and monitor the progress of these students to check the impact of this spending. Some teachers lack training to respond fully to the needs of some other groups of students, including the small proportion of students who have complex special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, when planning activities.
- More-able students enjoy new opportunities because of the actions taken by senior leaders. Students spoke with pride about some of the activities they engage in through the links the school has built with local employers and universities.
- Leaders have made changes to the curriculum so that it includes a broader range of subjects and is more engaging and motivating for students. New courses such as dance, economics and critical thinking have been introduced. Students appreciate these new opportunities and are

achieving well in these subjects.

- Students now have the choice of three modern foreign languages for study at Key Stage 3 and a much larger number of students now study three science subjects. Extra time has been devoted to the teaching of English in Years 10 and 11.
- A wide range of provision in lessons and extra-curricular activities successfully promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. During the inspection the school's community band prepared for a performance, showing excellent collaboration between students in all years, parents and the wider community.
- Visits and visitors enrich students' cultural development. The school promotes students' social and moral development in a number of ways, such as allowing students to take a lead in deciding on improvements, including to the school's policies on behaviour. A large number of students work as mentors, helping their peers, or contribute to the school community in other ways. Spiritual and cultural development is less widespread and more confined to particular subjects.
- Leadership and management in the sixth form are good. Improved guidance and on-going support have ensured that students start, and complete, courses that match their interests and abilities well. This helped most students, including those supported by the pupil premium, to make good progress in relation to their starting points in their 2013 AS- and A-level examinations.
- The local authority has helped school leaders to review the school's performance and set priorities for improvement based on a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has helped senior leaders to make and act upon robust judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and other aspects of provision. Some areas of the school's work have yet to be formally reviewed, including provision for the small proportion of disabled students and those who have complex educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and capacity for further improvement. It uses that understanding to set appropriate priorities and to hold school leaders to account. Governors evaluate their own performance regularly and engage in training so that they can, for example, interpret data about the performance of different groups of students and ensure that they understand and meet their statutory responsibilities concerning safeguarding. Governors are committed to improving the quality of leadership and of teaching and visit the school in order to check the information they are given about standards.
 - Governors ensure that financial resources are efficiently managed and have evaluated national research evidence, as well as the school's own experiences, to help determine how best to allocate the pupil premium in future to overcome these students' weaknesses in achievement. Governors have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and have linked teachers' pay to how well students are achieving.

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	117515
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	429992

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	1095
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Boakes
Headteacher	Debbie Upton
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2012
Telephone number	01438 232221
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