

The Basildon Upper Academy

Wickford Avenue, Basildon, Essex, SS13 3HL

Inspection dates

11–12 December 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, owing to a history of poor provision, attainment is still too low. There is too big a difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
- Teaching requires improvement because, although most individual lessons are now good, recent improvements need to be embedded for teaching to be securely good. The most serious inadequacies have been eradicated, but some inconsistencies persist.
- A new and powerful system to monitor students' progress has been introduced, but this is not yet used consistently by teachers to pitch work at the right level for students.
- 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

- In most lessons, students now make good progress because so much teaching is good.
- Leaders at all levels use performance information very well to challenge class teachers and monitor students' progress.
- The 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.
- Students behave well and feel safe. The overwhelming majority of students have positive attitudes and want to learn.
- Improvements in teaching are extremely well led. The impact of the programme of professional development is very clear in lessons.
- There are very clear systems for checking the quality of the academy's work so that improvement can be sustained.
- The sixth form is good. Students make very good progress in the sixth form.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, taught by 15 different teachers. Inspectors also carried out short visits to a number of lessons, some of which were with a senior leader.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including that 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 32 responses from parents to the online Parent View survey. They also evaluated parental and student responses collated by the academy.
- Discussions were held with the Executive Principal, Head of Academy, groups of teachers and leaders, groups of students, and two representatives from the governing body, including the Chair.

Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Natasha Campbell

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

- Basildon Upper Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The roll has fallen significantly since the academy opened, but numbers are now increasing through in-year admissions.
- Along with the Basildon Lower Academy, it forms The Basildon Academies Trust. The academies share an Executive Principal, but each academy has its own leadership with a Head of Academy.
- The Executive Principal was appointed in November 2012.
- At the previous inspection in March 2012, the academy was placed in special measures because it was failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education. Inspectors subsequently visited the academy on three occasions to monitor its progress.
- The large majority of students are of White British heritage, with a below-average proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and few who speak English as an additional language.
- The number of students supported through school action, is below average, while the number on school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is double the national average.
- Around half the students in Key Stage 4 are eligible for the pupil premium. This is a much higher proportion than in most schools. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and some other groups.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Thirty students currently attend alternative provision (education provided by other schools or colleges), at Circles Farm, South East Essex College, Crown College and Active Learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching so that it is good or outstanding in all lessons by:
 - using the academy's excellent information on students' performance to adapt lessons so that work is pitched at the right level for students, so they can accelerate their progress
 - having the confidence to adapt lessons in response to what teachers discover through their good questioning skills and their checking of students' understanding throughout lessons.
- Raise achievement further, especially for boys, through:
 - an even greater emphasis on reading and writing across all subjects
 - the greater promotion of mathematics across other subjects
 - building on the developing work for careers education
 - providing greater opportunities for students to develop enterprise skills and knowledge, and understanding of the adult world, by building on the work already being developed to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal, social health and economic education.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Due to the history of inadequate provision and some subjects being totally missing from the curriculum at Key Stage 3, current students have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. As a result, the good progress being made by students in many lessons still leaves a challenge for them and their teachers to reach their potential.
- Boys with low prior attainment do far less well than other students in the academy. Students who arrive in the academy having experienced poor education in their previous schools, often struggle because of the difficulty they experience in reading and writing. The academy is taking good steps to address this, such as the involving of sixth formers in supporting reading in Year 10. The delivery of literacy and numeracy courses through vocational contexts at college for some students following alternative provision is useful.
- Students attending off-site provision, make similar rates of progress to others. This is monitored well by the academy.
- The quality of learning is often good. The progress made by students was judged to be good or better in three quarters of the lessons seen by inspectors. The two contributory factors to this good achievement are engaging teaching coupled with students who are keen to learn.
- In the summer 2013 examinations, sixth form students achieved well because they made very good progress from their starting points. Sixth form students are highly appreciative of the level of personalised support that enables them to achieve well.
- In the summer 2013 examinations, there were some notable improvements. The number of top grade GCSE passes (at A* and A grades) showed a substantial increase as a result of the school addressing the needs of its most-able students.
- The gap between the attainment of students in receipt of additional government funding through the pupil premium and that of all students has been closed. These students do as well as other students.
- There has been a policy of entering students early for GCSE mathematics and English. This policy has been adapted to take account of recent changes in government policy. In the past, the policy had variable impact on different students. Some did not continue to follow the subject once they had reached a grade C, but the most-able students who gained a high-level pass at the end of Year 10 are now taking mathematics at GCE AS level, which is providing a good level of challenge for them.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The current picture of the quality of teaching is very positive, but the impact of teaching over time is not evident because much of the advance is quite recent and there has not yet been time to demonstrate that teaching has led to good progress.
- In the small minority of lessons where teaching is not yet good, teachers do not engage the students quickly enough. Moreover, although lesson planning is generally good, and teachers plan for how the lesson will be adapted to enable different ability groups to make progress, these plans do not always transfer to reality. The result is that in some lessons the less-able

students struggle while more-able students end up doing work that is too easy.

- Inspectors were in complete agreement with the academy's judgement of the quality of teaching. The large majority of teaching is good or better, with a small amount that requires improvement. This represents an enormous move forward over the last year. Where teaching is outstanding, teachers use imaginative strategies so that students learn extremely well.
- Examples of the positive impact of training were seen in lessons where teachers asked probing questions to help students to develop their thinking. Teachers listen to what students say and encourage them to share their ideas, but they sometimes lack the confidence to depart from their lesson plan in response to student feedback.
- Teachers demonstrate an appropriate knowledge and understanding of examination requirements, and use this to help students. There is some good practice in developing students' literacy skills, with a focus on the development of subject-specific vocabulary. The use of mathematics across subjects is less well developed.
- Marking is now good. Students like the stickers with feedback and targets. Marking at its best is resulting in two-way conversations between teachers and students, and this is proving very effective. The school's system for monitoring students' progress ensures that work is set and marked regularly. Teachers use information on students' progress to monitor their progress frequently, but do not yet use it consistently enough to set work that is at the right level of difficulty for students' different abilities.
- Last year, some students in the sixth form were underachieving because of a lack of subject specialist teachers. This has improved through moving some existing staff and making new appointments. Where this has not been possible, the school has been innovative in using technology to link students with subject-specialist university teachers for physics and classical civilisation. This is proving very worthwhile and has positive spin-offs in increasing links between the academy and university staff.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour which, at the time of the last inspection, was very poor, is now a strength of the school. Students are polite and are proud of the academy.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is good. Relationships between staff and students are good and this engenders a positive attitude to learning.
- Students who would previously have received a fixed-term exclusion are now being placed in the new 'Linx centre' where they do productive work to improve their learning and behaviour. There are now very few fixed-term exclusions.
- Students know about different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and say that it is rare. They know who to turn to if they have concerns.
- Students support the academy's maxim 'aspire, believe and achieve'. Ambitious academic and personal targets ensure that low expectations are a thing of the past. In lessons, students settle quickly, follow instructions and sustain their concentration. Relations between staff and students are very good, and students are happy to help one another when working in pairs or groups.
- Attendance has improved dramatically. Attendance panels are doing effective work. The

academy has worked effectively to reduce persistent absences. At the time of the last inspection, almost one quarter of students were absent. Attendance is now at least in line with the national average. The academy operates effective systems to ensure good attendance, including a rigorous use of sanctions in collaboration with the local authority. Senior leaders will be the first to say that far more important than the sanctions and rewards in promoting good attendance has been that the academy is a much more attractive place to be. Similarly, because behaviour is so much better, students want to attend. Students told inspectors that, at the time of the last inspection, it was safer outside the academy than inside. Now it is safer inside the academy.

- The academy listens to students. Examples include the academy acting on students' concerns regarding gates opening onto a dark underpass.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers, including governors, are ambitious for the academy, and communicate their high expectations. Through the skill and decisiveness of the Executive Principal, the work of senior leaders and governors has been focused and galvanised to bring about rapid improvement.
- The Executive Principal has personally trained senior leaders and modelled her expectations. 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.
- There is a highly effective programme of training to improve all levels of staff. Middle leaders are very appreciative of their training. Senior leaders regularly check on teaching and have set up opportunities so that the 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 used its expertise in performance management in business to ensure that the academy's system is effective and that salary progression is linked closely to students' progress.
- Teachers have huge respect for the leader of teaching and learning, and therefore are keen to seek her evaluation. They value the advice given. A culture has developed of frequent 'drop-ins' to supplement more formal observations. Hard messages are given and received in a supportive environment.
- Engagement with parents and the community is now strong. Parental attendance at review days is excellent. Recent responses on Parent View reflect much more positive opinions. The academy's own surveys show that parents are highly positive about its work.
- Senior and middle leaders have very effective procedures for checking the academy's work and these reviews are used to have a quick and well-informed impact on future actions. The work of each faculty is regularly reviewed.
- The additional government funding provided through the pupil premium has been suitably allocated to secure better achievement for these students and to ensure equality of opportunity for all. The impact can be seen in the elimination of the gap between the achievement of these students and others.
- The academy makes very good use of external support. For example, teachers have benefited from courses at Billericay School, and in-school professional development has drawn on the expertise, experience and advice from other schools and consultants, including from the local authority.

■ The academy has been working to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. While focusing on improving academic achievement and the quality of teaching, the school has begun to train staff to develop these areas. Currently, students' moral and social development is better than their spiritual and cultural development. The curriculum over the Basildon academies as a whole was too narrowly focused on a small range of subjects. As a result, students in the upper academy have missed out on a range of subjects, including the humanities, music and religious education. Some of these gaps are being filled for some students. The academy is now re-engaging with its original specialism of enterprise and developing its independent careers and guidance. In all these areas, there are gaps in students' experience due to previous poor provision.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now fulfilling its role effectively. There has been a review of governance and extensive training. Some additional appointments to the governing body bring national expertise in education and this is used well. 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.
- The Chair regularly tours classrooms with the Executive Principal and, as a result, has gained a clear grasp of what to look for. Governors are much more visible to staff and students. Governors are now able to hold leaders to account by asking timely and searching questions.
- Governors understand their responsibilities in regard to safeguarding and they ensure that arrangements meet all statutory requirements. Governors know how effectively the funding from pupil premium is allocated. They are regularly informed about all aspects of the school by informative reports from leaders and they monitor and ask questions about each aspect of the academy's provision.

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	135897
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	424264

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	14–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	731
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Principal	Bev Bell
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2012
Telephone number	01268 552536
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Email address	admin@basildonacademies.org.uk

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