

Great Barr School

Aldridge Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B44 8NU

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2014

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| 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 a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The overall achievement of students in GCSE examinations is below the national average.
- The proportion of students making the expected progress in mathematics remains low, although it is improving quickly. The proportion of students making more than expected progress is lower than other students nationally in English and mathematics.
- The achievement of more-able students is not high enough. Too many students have not improved upon the grades they obtained when taking their GCSE examinations early.
- The way subjects are organised at Key Stage 4 limits the opportunities for some students to gain good GCSE grades.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and senior leaders have tackled the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection well. There is a radically improved plan for how subjects are organised and examined.
- The school is achieving its overarching vision for 'Nurturing Potential; Creating Opportunity'.
- The sixth form is good. The progress of sixth form students is good and academic standards are steadily rising, particularly at AS level.
- Governors are monitoring school performance well, and linking staff pay to students' progress. They have positively resolved a budget deficit.
- The attainment and achievement of students in science is good, and significantly better than other students nationally.
- Teaching quality has improved substantially since the previous inspection and is good across the school. It is not yet outstanding because some class discussions do not engage every student, and some written feedback is too general so students do not know what further action to take in order to improve.
- Students behave well, enjoy learning and actively take part in lessons.
- Students are kept safe well, through a well-run house system that allows students to be 'known' by teachers and senior managers, despite the large size of the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 43 lessons including some joint observations with senior staff, met with teachers, middle and senior leaders, members of the governing body, groups of students, parents and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at students' work in class, analysed school records for performance, attendance and behaviour, policies and records about safeguarding, and scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors observed the school at break times, and between lessons, conducting informal conversations with staff and students.
- Questionnaires were received from 24 staff.
- At the end of the inspection, 18 responses had been received to the online survey Parent View.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Brian Cartwright, Lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Helen Owen | Additional Inspector |
| Shanaz Khan | Additional Inspector |
| Steven Goldsmith | Additional Inspector |
| John Taylor | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- The school has twice as many students than the average-sized secondary school.
- About half the students are from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds, which is double the national proportion. The largest of these groups are from Indian or Black Caribbean backgrounds.
- The proportion of students whose first language is not English is rising. There is a small but rising number of students from Eastern Europe who are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is lower than average. The proportion of students supported by school action, or with a statement of special educational needs, is also below average.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and any with a parent in the armed services.
- None of the students are taught elsewhere. A very few students are involved in off-site work-related learning for part of their week.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the changes to mathematics teaching and programmes of study already begun, to secure improvements in mathematics achievement over time.
- Ensure that current Year 11 students who gained GCSE grades in Year 10 continue to learn and achieve their potential of even higher grades this year.
- Implement as quickly as feasible the changes to how subjects are organised at Key Stage 4.
- Move teaching to outstanding by:
 - further development of teacher-led class discussion and questioning to ensure that every student is fully committed and involved at the limit of their abilities
- Sharpening written feedback so students can act upon the good advice straight away.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement in mathematics is not yet good because improvements in mathematics teaching have not been in place for long enough.
- Students who took GCSE examinations in June 2013 started at the school with broadly average levels of attainment in English and mathematics. They achieved broadly average GCSE grades in most subjects, but not in mathematics, despite an improvement from 2012. For many of those students, their progress in mathematics was inadequate.
- Currently, students in mathematics are making reasonable and sometimes good progress in all year groups. Inspection of the work of Year 11 students shows them to be on track to meet the nationally expected levels of progress and to gain average academic standards in the summer of 2014. There are recent improvements in the number of students exceeding expected levels of progress in mathematics.
- Not enough more-able students in English and mathematics are exceeding the expected levels of progress, when compared to national figures. The achievement of students across all subjects including English and mathematics was, therefore, below average.
- In the 2013 GCSE results, the performance gap between students eligible for support through the pupil premium, and other students in the school, narrowed to about half a GCSE grade, including in English and mathematics; the national average is nearly a grade. Eligible students made significantly better progress than similar students nationally. The performance gap is also reducing in Key Stage 3.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is also used to good effect so that 73% of targeted pupils are at or above expected levels in English, 78% of them in mathematics, after just one term of support.
- The achievement of students from different backgrounds is not significantly different from each other, including those from Indian or Black Caribbean backgrounds. As with all students, they are not yet achieving as well as similar students nationally overall.
- Recently arrived students from Eastern Europe are made very welcome, settling quickly into school life. They appreciate the quality of support they get that helps them to make rapid progress in learning English.
- In English, including English literature, students achieved an above-average proportion of grade C GCSEs. Many did so when they sat English language in their Year 10 thanks to good teaching. However, not enough students went on to gain the very highest grade A and A* grades. They focused on English literature in Year 11 rather than attempting to improve their earlier English language grades. As a result, students' overall achievement in English language was below the average for students nationally, but not inadequate.
- In contrast, students make good progress in all their science courses to attain above-average GCSE grades, including a high proportion of the highest A and A* grades. This is because of consistently good teaching in all years and sufficient specialist science teaching time to deliver practical science lessons that capture students' interests. Students attain very high standards in drama, because of very high-quality teaching over time.

- Academic progress of students in the sixth form is in line with the national average overall, and above average for the vocational and applied courses. The numbers who complete their studies and success rates are above average. Fewer students attempt four academic AS levels than in the past. Progress at AS level now significantly above average.

The quality of teaching is good

- Lessons are usually good, and often outstanding, in all subjects. Effective monitoring and support by subject leaders and senior staff has driven up the quality of teaching substantially. As a result, in almost every lesson, students from all groups are making good progress.
- Teaching of mathematics has substantially improved since the previous inspection. At this inspection, the majority of mathematics lessons seen were good and none were inadequate. Teachers are now using a common approach to setting out work, a common marking policy for mathematics, and consistently using literacy to promote the understanding of mathematical processes. These strategies are helping to resolve weaknesses related to problem solving and understanding the mathematical concepts behind the various calculation methods students can use. A practical teaching approach is helping here, using equipment to help students visualise the calculations and problems they are tackling.
- Teachers effectively use the detailed information they have about students' prior learning to plan lessons that will challenge all their students. This allows students to work on interesting activities that stretch them. When students succeed with these more difficult tasks, they enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done.
- This widespread good matching of work to students' abilities ensures that disabled students and those who have special education needs are included in learning, and make good progress in their lessons. Students with specific learning needs are well supported through the guidance and support unit (GSU). Vulnerable learners benefit from careful individual timetable plans, specialist literacy and numeracy teaching and good in-class support from teaching assistants. If they are off-site on work-related learning, good monitoring of their attendance and the impact of their experience helps to justify this personalised timetable.
- An intense reading programme has recovered the mean reading age for lower attaining Year 7 students to be in line with their chronological age. In addition, all Year 7 and 8 students spend one lunch break per week in a supervised reading session, accessing literature pitched to enthuse and challenge them. This is working well and helping to raise literacy standards, with the full cooperation of students and volunteer staff.
- One common feature of outstanding teaching is the extent to which every student puts their hearts as well as minds into rising to the challenge. In these lessons, the interaction between teachers and students is dynamic and two-way, indicated by students individually thinking, responding, practising and improving their responses. Learners thrive in these lessons, and are developing a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning. The key characteristic here is in the quality of response from students, as they seek further understanding through their personal dialogue with the teacher.
- In addition, the best learning occurs when teachers allow enough time for students to think about their work. Teachers' finely tuned sense of how students are progressing allows them to move learning on once the ideas have been grasped, rather than too quickly. These lessons 'flow' because of the skilled timing and subsequent direction by the teacher.
- Teachers are skilled at devising and targeting questions to students of different abilities. This

does allow all pupils a chance to contribute to the discussion, but doing so 'one at a time' causes the rest of the class to await their turn at an appropriately pitched question. This means that, occasionally, some students' attention wanes.

- Teachers mark work accurately, with praise when due and advice to students on how to further improve. Sometimes that advice is followed, but that advice is not always direct enough. For example, asking students to 'be careful with spelling' would be easier to act upon if the teacher required them to check and correct words the teacher had highlighted in the written work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students from a very wide range of different backgrounds work together and play together well. Teachers and support staff model the social and moral standards expected, including their own effective valuing of each student, irrespective of their backgrounds.
- This comfortable cohesion contributes to good learning, allowing students to learn from each other's cultures, and develops a strong sense of mutual respect. Students wear their uniform with some pride, with almost all of them managing to stay smart through the day, once the effect of break time games have been tidied up.
- The house system, with its younger year-based tutor groups for Years 7 and 8 and vertically organised groups for Years 9, 10 and 11, plays a key role in ensuring that students do not get 'lost' in this big school. Tutors know their students well, and students know who to approach if they have concerns.
- The house system is the main vehicle for developing students' spiritual, moral, social and citizenship awareness, and this works well. House assemblies tackle whole-school issues, and are the place where school leaders emphasise high standards and expectations. The school runs a systematic philosophy, citizenship and ethics (PCE) teaching programme that includes advice on tackling homophobic bullying.
- The schools' work to keep students safe and secure is good. Movement around this large and complex school is calm, orderly and purposeful. Despite often long walks from one class to another, students are punctual and learning is not delayed. Break times are well supervised, with several different food serving sites and well-respected rules for where students from different years may congregate. Year 10 students say behaviour is 'considerably better now' compared to when they started school.
- The school buildings are of variable age and condition, but inside are clean and almost completely litter free; impressive given the number of people using the site every day. Students' work is on display in most corridors and in all classrooms, and helps to publicly celebrate rising standards.
- Attendance is rising to close to the national average for secondary schools, and above that for schools in similar settings. Persistent absence is falling. Exclusions for serious disciplinary incidents have fallen to no higher than the national average, although students from Black African heritage are more likely to be excluded than others, as is the case nationally.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe, and understand how to stay safe, including when using the internet. They know of different forms of bullying including that presented by modern social media. Students say that derogatory language is not tolerated by staff if they overhear it.

However, they say that, between students, offensive language can occur and some students say that is 'just banter'; these students are not fully aware of the hurt such casual banter can cause.

- Recent school surveys of most parents, using an Ofsted questionnaire, showed most are happy with the school in all respects. Inspectors spoke with some parents and their children, who confirmed that when the school knows about bullying, it deals with it effectively. Incidents of bullying are rare and reducing over time.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders and managers at all levels, including heads of department, have tackled the points for improvement following the previous inspection with great thoughtfulness. They recognise that to continue with the current way subjects are examined and timetabled risks continued mediocre outcomes overall, even where individual lessons are consistently good.
- To make the necessary radical change, the headteacher has rationalised the senior leadership team. This is now a smaller, more effective and cohesive group who have sufficient delegated authority to lead their areas of responsibility well.
- Early or repeated entry for GCSE examinations has stopped. The proportion of qualifications that are GCSE only at Key Stage 4 is increasing.
- For example, an assistant headteacher is using the expertise from science to address the shortfalls in mathematics through practical problem-solving methods. Advice from external consultants has identified the fundamental causes of underachievement, and led a root and branch change to how mathematics is taught from Year 7.
- A deputy headteacher is driving up teaching quality effectively. Teaching staff report favourably on the quality of professional development available as a result of sharp monitoring and evaluation of teaching. There is a palpable sense of urgency amongst staff as they collectively work together to raise students' achievement, and they are rightly confident that the school is rapidly improving.
- The local authority has provided some expertise in improving mathematics, although the school has worked more closely with a partner in a different local authority. The authority has confidence that the school is improving quickly.
- Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and meet the necessary statutory requirements. School leaders are alert to local circumstances, are trusted by students, parents and careers, and take early action to deal with any potential harm to students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has supported the rapid changes to the leadership team well. Governors make informed judgements on the performance of the school, recording their evaluations in detailed minutes.
 - Governors understand school performance data well and how it should inform judgements about the quality of teaching over time. As a result, they directly ensure that staff pay is linked to staff responsibilities and performance, including that of the headteacher.
 - Governors have successfully managed the school budget from deficit to a current surplus.
- Senior governors agree that an external independent review of the effectiveness of governance

would be useful in identifying any improvements to be made as the school undergoes substantial changes.

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 | 103550 |
| Local authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 429043 |

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

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| 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 | 2099 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 220 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Leigh Crowe |
| Headteacher | Catherine Abbott |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 November 2012 |
| Telephone number | 0121 366 6611 |
| Fax number | 0121 366 6007 |
| Email address | secretariat@greatbarr.bham.sch.uk |

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

