

Balcarras School

East End Road, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, GL53 8QF

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The clear vision of the headteacher to give all students an education of the highest quality is evident in every aspect of the school's work.
- Inspirational teaching, combined with excellent individual encouragement for all students, results in outstanding progress.
- Standards are high. They are well above national averages and continue to rise.
- Academic information is used well by teachers to support and guide students. Skills are taught at a pace that suits the learner.
- Discussions between students are of high quality, and encourage them to think deeply.
- Effective literacy skills are encouraged in all subjects and contribute to the high standards.
- Students demonstrate outstanding behaviour in lessons and around the school. They want to be in lessons and to learn. They are eager to take part in all that the school offers.
- Attendance is well above average. Students and staff alike appreciate being at school. Almost all students take part in at least one after school activity.
- There is a pervasive culture of enjoying learning. The focus on individual effort is reflected in the high quality of displays.
- Students are very safe in school. The procedures for rewarding good behaviour and dealing with poor behaviour work extremely well.
- The school nurtures and encourages positive relationships between everyone, no matter what their position in school. Effort is rewarded and everyone is highly motivated to do their best.
- School leaders and governors work extremely well together, and are always visible around the school.
- The school is always looking at ways to get even better. It is highly effective in improving the education for students in other schools through its work as a teaching school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. The quality of teaching, leadership and what the school provides is exceptional. Students gain a very high standard in examinations.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out in response to a complaint made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. The complaint was deemed to be a qualifying complaint and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an unannounced inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether:
 - safeguarding procedures are adequate, including the response to students presenting challenging behaviour
 - suitable adjustments are made to behaviour management procedures according to the students' needs and disabilities
 - staff are suitably trained and able to seek advice and support when required
 - leaders and the governing body are effective in monitoring and evaluating policy and practice for behaviour management and safeguarding within the school.
- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, of which six were jointly with school leaders. The inspectors looked at students' work and student case studies. They noted the quality of behaviour management plans. Meetings were held with six groups of students from all year groups, except Year 12, to discuss their views about behaviour, safety and support. They met informally with students during break times and lunchtimes.
- An inspector met with three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors met senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers to discuss all aspects of school management including safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors took account of 113 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 50 staff questionnaire responses. They held discussions with a group of parents.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the school's own information on students' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.
- At the time of this inspection students in Year 11 and Year 12 were taking national examinations and students in Year 13 were in the last week of their studies.

Inspection team

Jonathan Palk, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracey Briggs

Additional Inspector

Helen Owen

Additional Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

Ingrid Adams

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Balcarras School is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It became a teaching school in May 2012. There are 20 schools in the partnership. The school provides initial teacher education training through the school direct route.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and the percentage of students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is below average. In this school this funding is used to support children in the care of the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who need extra support is below the national average, as is the proportion of students who need more extra support or who have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school does not use any off-site training provider.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum level expected for students' attainment and progress for secondary schools.
- Balcarras School converted to become an academy school on July 2011. When its predecessor school, Balcarras School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance by making sure that the governing body plays more of a role in checking on the implementation of the child protection policy and policies related to safeguarding, ensuring:
 - that the child protection policy states clearly when the governing body is to monitor and review the implementation of the policy
 - that the child protection policy is available in the teachers' handbook.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Attainment on entry to the school is above average. Standards are very high across the school. The proportion of students attaining five good quality GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is well above average. The proportion of the most able students gaining five or more A* and A grades is very high. Attainment is equally high in all subjects.
- Students enter the sixth form with a broad range of attainment typical of most sixth forms nationally. The results at GCSE A level are outstanding. They exceed national averages. Consequently, students gain access to the top universities or the apprenticeships of their choice. All students have post 18 destinations.
- The school's track record is strong and results have improved year on year, exceeding national trends.
- The most able students achieve exceptionally well. A small number of higher ability students take mathematics GCSE a year early. This enables them to concentrate on higher mathematical studies prior to starting their A-level course work. Mathematics attainment in the school is very high. The emphasis on developing understanding and reasoning skills is a key reason for the success of this subject.
- The progress all students make is outstanding. Girls have tended to make more progress than boys in the past. Boys of all abilities involve themselves more with activities because they are offered a greater choice of GCSE subjects. By removing compulsory subjects from their options, boys and girls follow their interests and aspire to high grades.
- The emphasis placed on rewarding effort works well for boys. They have responded enthusiastically to the motivation programme and boys' progress rates are now matching girls' of similar attainment.
- Students supported by additional government funding exceed the rate of progress of other students. The school supports and motivates these students, as it does others, with a blend of high expectations and help to access high quality extra-curricular activities. The personal support from the heads of house, for these students to succeed, is striking. Very nearly all go on to enter the sixth form to follow academic courses.
- Students who start behind their year group make rapid progress in the first three years. They benefit from small class groups, the best teaching and well trained teaching assistants.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs have achieved significantly above the average for this group, year on year. They are keen to be independent. This is supported effectively by high expectations of their involvement in all lessons and in the life of the school.
- The focus on securing strong literacy skills also contributes to successful learning of all students. The regular checking of literacy skills by each subject department is backed up by a marking scheme that focuses on spelling, punctuation and grammar. The development of literacy is threaded throughout the school with easy access for students to a range of supporting materials and high quality displays of written work.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding. For the students 'it is the best thing about the school'. The excellent relationships between students and their teachers is just one of the ingredients of outstanding learning in lessons.
- Teachers are experts in their subjects. Teachers skilfully build on the knowledge and skills students have. They are precise in their starting points for activities and, in discussions, offer tantalising glimpses of where the learning is going. This may take the form of a high quality piece of writing, an explanation to a mathematical problem or a creative solution to a design challenge. This approach rarely fails to engage students.

- Disabled students and those with special educational needs experience the same high quality learning as others. In one outstanding mathematics lesson, plenty of repetition, short practical tasks, songs and clear instructions typified the teaching. The focus on building confidence in one skill before moving on meant that the teacher could return to a secure platform each time a mathematical misunderstanding arose.
- Specialist staff support in lessons and teachers are well briefed as to how behaviours are to be managed. Because students' needs are well understood, students strive hard to please, and are eager to show that they can manage on their own.
- Students are encouraged by praise and the obvious delight of their classmates when they get things 'spot on'. Praise is balanced, to encourage and to challenge for a higher result. Students have time to think about their learning and also apply this, often through discussions with each other or a range of short tasks in lessons or homework. The work is almost always marked well, giving students the feedback they need to move on.
- Teaching is inclusive of all learners. Teachers probe in a way that seeks clarification that students understand. Teachers always seek a deeper response when they sense a student can go that bit further. This drives the pace of lessons, and challenges students at all ability levels.
- The teachers ensure that the rooms are stimulating, where literacy is emphasised, for example through annotations on diagrams, reports and longer narratives. Students are reminded to use these as aids to their written work. The displays in the corridors stress high expectations, through the quality of work and celebration of individual achievements in and outside school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is outstanding. Students are fully committed to their learning. They arrive promptly to lessons, expecting to learn. Students value their time in lessons. They work together spontaneously and are happy to take improvement points from their friends as well as their teachers.
- Students' confidence in knowing exactly where they are in their learning encourages students to ask questions of teachers rather than wait until questioned. This is particularly the case in the sixth form where the quality of debate and discussion is such it is hard to distinguish who is teaching whom.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students will confide in staff and their friends their most personal of concerns. They know that these shall be acted upon in their best interests. They report that teachers are quick to pick up when they are feeling 'under the weather', and set about 'putting this right'.
- The school's systems for managing behaviour are effective. There are incidents when students have been bullied but parents and the students report these are sorted out very quickly. Rarely needing a second referral.
- Students who join the school, disillusioned with education, settle in very quickly. The heads of house pay particular attention to helping them build and sustain relationships. For example, they encourage them to join clubs, or provide them with house responsibilities. The school actively promotes equality of opportunity and does not tolerate any form of discrimination.
- The strong personal, social and health education is comprehensive in its coverage of sex and relationship education, homophobia and staying safe when using electronic devices. Students point out that the lessons are effective in helping them stay safe. However, it is usually only the younger teachers who fully appreciate the risks associated with social network sites.
- The school site is totally free of litter and there is no graffiti. The shared areas, such as the canteen, sports hall and the green spaces, are maintained to a high standard of cleanliness. Students play their part in keeping it that way. The organisation of the canteen lends an air of calm to the school day. There is little need for queues or queuing. With plenty for students to do at lunchtimes, by way of clubs and sports, there is little opportunity for students to become bored with school.
- Attendance rates are well above average and high in the sixth form. Fixed term exclusions are

low, and falling.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's passion for everyone to succeed is infectious. Staff and parents returning the questionnaire are unanimous in their support of the school. There is a very high staff attendance rate. This brings a positive benefit to students, who receive consistently good or better teaching.
- The rigorous tracking of students' progress is highly effective. It is organised so all staff are involved at some point. Consideration is given to a wide range of evidence of each pupil's performance and commitment. This results in tight working across subject departments and year groups to channel highly effective support. It ensures that when students show talent or aptitude for particular skills, the staff are on hand to promote and steer the students in the right direction.
- The heads of house play a fundamental role in the success of all students. They get to know the families and gain their trust. They ensure that additional government funds are used immediately to maintain students' access to education.
- School leaders teach for around half of their timetable. This sends a clear message that everyone's performance has to be of the best. Leaders know their teachers well.
- Teachers are helped to develop their teaching through the work of the teaching school. This ensures that highly talented teachers have a constant audience for their skills and an environment for taking their expertise to the next level. The setting of targets for teachers, and salary increases are inextricably linked to students' achievements.
- Staff are extremely positive in seeking out ways to improve their practice. This goes beyond the offer of a comprehensive training programme and their involvement in school based research. It extends to them volunteering to support partner schools.
- Pastoral support and safeguarding procedures are strong, and meet current requirements. All the required checks are made when recruiting staff. Staff safeguarding training is current. Any concerns are rigorously followed up and the checking by senior managers is thorough.
- The rewards systems for positive attitudes and behaviour are well focused on students' needs, for example free breakfasts.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Academic and pastoral support is woven into each day and students are consulted at regular intervals as to what would benefit their sixth form experience. Comprehensive procedures are in place to support students going on to university.
- Very few students leave at the end of Year 12. However, they are successfully supported into other employment with training.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors provide a strong force in the improvement of the school. They maintain a firm oversight of the progress all groups are making and compare this to national expectations. They use finances wisely to upgrade resources that benefit everybody, including those entitled to pupil premium funding.
 - Governors retain a good oversight of staff performance through their regular reviews of subject departments' work. They collaborate with school leaders in planning the programme for the teaching school to maximise its benefits for teachers at Balcarras and local schools.
 - Governors meet regularly with leaders to review specific aspects of the school development plan to ensure actions are in keeping with the objectives they help to set. Success measures are clear and governors are always asking, 'Did it make a difference?'
 - The governing body has recently strengthened its expertise to ensure robust checking of safeguarding procedures. Currently, the governors have only limited oversight of the safeguarding arrangements in the school. This is the one area of the school's work where governors are not challenging the school robustly enough.

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	136474
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	442661

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	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1333
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	358
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Collie
Headteacher	Chris Healy
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01242 515881
Email address	admin@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk

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