

The Basildon Upper Academy

Wickford Avenue, Basildon, Essex SS13 3HL

Inspection dates

19–20 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive principal and head of the upper academy are determined to provide the very highest quality of education for the pupils at the academy. The academy continues to improve rapidly.
- The governing body challenges the leadership and supports the academy well so that it continues to improve.
- Leaders rigorously monitor teaching and learning and provide effective training. This has led to teaching which is typically good.
- Pupils currently at the academy are making good progress across a range of subjects.
- Different groups of pupils, such as those with special educational needs or those entitled to support from additional funding, make progress at a similar rate to other pupils.
- Pupils feel safe and are well supported by academy staff. Leaders ensure that pupils are well cared for. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the site. They show respect for each other and adults.
- Pupils' personal development and confidence are being effectively developed. As the quality of teaching improves, pupils respond positively to teachers' raised expectations.
- The academy strongly promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form provides a good education for pupils. The progress of pupils following academic courses is improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- National examination results do not reflect the good progress being made by pupils in their lessons and current work.
- Occasionally, some teachers' questioning does not effectively assess, probe and deepen pupils' learning.
- Some teaching does not always suitably challenge, inspire and motivate pupils to do their best.
- Some pupils are not yet fully equipped to learn unaided.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so more teaching is outstanding and standards of learning are improved, by:
 - equipping pupils with effective study skills and making sure they are practised routinely
 - consistently using effective questioning to assess, probe and deepen pupils' learning
 - planning learning which suitably challenges, motivates and enthuses pupils
 - fostering a passion for learning in all pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive principal, head of the upper academy, governing body and senior leaders have shown relentless drive to secure improvement and raise expectations of what pupils should achieve. Staff share the academy's vision 'aspire, believe and achieve', as one member commented: 'The school has a clear strategy on how to drive forward progress.' Pupils commented on how teachers support them to achieve their best. It is the shared commitment and sharp focus on checking that actions are effective that has led to rapid improvements in teaching, pupil progress, behaviour and attendance.
- The leadership of teaching is highly effective. Teachers receive regular high-quality training to develop their individual needs and this input is highly valued. Effective monitoring of teaching in a supportive and nurturing environment has led to good teaching across the academy.
- Staff are firmly held to account for their performance. Teachers' targets and professional development are linked to the academy's development plan and to expectations for progress. Pay awards are given appropriately, according to performance. Where underperformance in teaching has persisted, this has been tackled decisively.
- Middle leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their subject. Performance against interim achievement goals is routinely evaluated. Academy policies and processes are consistently applied. Systems to track pupils' progress are used well to pinpoint where individuals or groups are not making the progress they should. The additional support that is given is timely and helps pupils to make good progress.
- Well-targeted use of the pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils are strongly supported, with the result that the gap between their achievement and that of others in the academy is closing rapidly.
- Liaison with the lower academy is much improved. The deployment of the team for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs across both sites has ensured continuity of care. This has helped disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to make good progress in line with their peers.
- The curriculum has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is now contributing effectively to pupils' improved attendance and good personal development. Pupils benefit from studying a range of subjects – academic as well as vocational. The number of qualifications they study is linked to their ability. Relevant work-related courses and effective careers guidance ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their life. Almost all pupils progress to further education, training or employment when they leave the academy. Pupils appreciate the range of trips and activities that are on offer and these help to generate high aspirations. For example, one pupil spoke enthusiastically about his trip to a Michelin-starred restaurant as part of his catering course.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a planned tutorial programme. The academy makes pupils aware of the potential dangers of extremism and radicalisation and helps pupils to also appreciate the diversity of modern Britain. Pupils understand, reflect and empathise with people from different countries, backgrounds and beliefs. A newly arrived Romanian pupil spoke highly of the welcome and support he had received from staff and pupils.
- Parents have been impressed with the level of support from the academy. A pupil progress champion liaises with families, providing guidance with study at home. The academy has begun to offer a wider programme of workshops to help encourage further parental involvement.
- The academy has benefitted from support from the local authority and other schools in Essex. The local authority has confidence in the ability of senior leaders to drive forward improvement.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors ensure that the academy is robustly held to account. Governors bring a range of experience and skills to the role. They have received extensive training and are regularly updated on wider education matters in their meetings. This engagement and due diligence has ensured that they ask questions that are challenging and pertinent.
 - Governors regularly visit the academy and are therefore knowledgeable about the academy and its provision. They fully understand that there is more to do to enable the academy to be outstanding.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff understand their roles with regard to safeguarding children, including protecting them from the risk of radicalisation, extremism and child sexual exploitation. Academy leaders work closely and in a timely way with external agencies where concerns arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers use information on what pupils can and cannot do to plan learning that fully supports their needs. Teachers review performance regularly through the use of 'Personal Learning Checklists' and schedule subsequent additional learning 'Therapy' sessions. Pupils spoke highly of this provision and the support they receive from teachers and sixth form mentors. Pupils were clear on what they had to do to improve. One parent commented: 'PLCs enable me to monitor my daughter's progress and ensures that she receives individualised assistance dependent upon her needs'. Marking is helpful for pupils and they respond well to the feedback. Most pupils address the areas for improvement given by their teachers.
- There is a positive climate for learning within classrooms. This is because there are good relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils feel comfortable to seek help when needed and they are not afraid to get answers wrong. Pupils will keep trying when faced with a difficult problem and this is due to the positive encouragement they receive from their teachers.
- Pupils enjoy the opportunity to debate and discuss ideas. They respond well to high expectations and apply themselves to practical tasks with enthusiasm. In a dynamic catering lesson, pupils were encouraged to act as though they were professionals in a commercial kitchen. Learning was focused and fast paced with high-quality dishes made in a short space of time. The class rapidly learnt new practical skills.
- Teachers usually use effective questioning to assess pupils' understanding and to probe and deepen learning. In a history lesson there was a sophisticated discussion about nationalism, extremism and its link to economic factors. Occasionally, questioning is less effective and pupils lack the confidence to challenge or expand on their thoughts and ideas, and this limits their understanding.
- Many teachers' good subject knowledge enables pupils to make accurate detailed notes. On occasion, there can be an over reliance on the teacher, where the pupil copies notes rather than summarising or altering the information as appropriate for the task.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- As the quality of teaching has improved, pupils have grown in self-confidence. They speak positively about the education they receive and are developing into successful learners. Rewards are appreciated and badges are worn with pride.
- The academy cares for each pupil very well. Support is readily available for any pupil who experiences difficulties; pupils readily accept this support. The Return to Learn Centre helps pupils with emotional issues when they need additional support away from their peers. Pupils commented that they would like more guidance on staying physically fit and mental health matters. This has been recognised and planned for by senior leaders.
- Pupils' understanding of different types of bullying is well developed. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff would deal with it swiftly should it occur. The academy has 'The Bubble' – a facility run by pupils in their role as anti-bullying ambassadors. This is a highly successful programme with pupils lending their support not just within the academy but also with pupils in the lower academy and with local primary schools. All parents in the latest academy survey report that their child feels safe and is well looked after.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- There is a calm and orderly atmosphere in the academy. Pupils mix well together and are respectful towards one another. Older pupils support younger pupils through the vertical tutoring system. Pupils are proud of their academy and take care of their environment and, as a result, the academy is clean and free of litter.
- In the vast majority of lessons, pupils are well behaved. There is little low-level disruption. Sometimes, pupils may not participate in class discussion and will sit passively.
- The academy is rigorous in its approach to managing attendance, and staff follow up on absence very quickly. As a result, attendance has improved at all stages in the academy. It is now above the national average and persistent absence has dropped. This is having a positive impact on achievement.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils enter the academy with exceptionally low starting points and improve rapidly through Key Stage 4 so that they make good progress in the majority of their subjects, including English and mathematics. The academy's own tracking data, assessment information and the work in pupils' books clearly indicate that current pupils are making good progress overall.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was below average. The academy is still waiting for information and communication technology results which will affect this headline measure. GCSE results were affected by pupils entering the academy with exceptionally low levels of knowledge and skills and some pupils had a history of poor attendance. In English, pupils made better than expected progress than did so nationally. Current pupils are attaining more highly than previous pupils at this stage in the academic year.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils in 2015 was in line with their peers. There was slightly stronger improvement in mathematics than in English. Intervention 'Therapy' sessions had a strong impact on helping pupils to close the gap between their achievement and that of their peers nationally.
- The special educational needs team has a clear understanding of the needs of individual pupils and well-targeted support is in place. As a result, the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good.
- Pupils who have English as an additional language make good progress and often perform better than other pupils.
- The academy has a smaller than average proportion of pupils who are particularly able. In 2015, the proportion of A* and A grades achieved by the most-able pupils improved in a range of subjects. Progress for this group is in line with their peers. Current work indicates that in some subjects there is less opportunity to demonstrate creativity and imagination.
- The academy ensures that all pupils receive informative careers advice and support. Pupils commented upon how useful the support was when choosing examination courses or college placements. As a result, the vast majority of pupils progress to the next stage of education and training of their choice.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners typically enter the sixth form with attainment below the national average. Results for learners studying vocational Level 3 subjects are above average and have consistently risen for the past three years. The proportion of learners gaining the higher grades at AS and A level has been below average. The gap between the achievement of learners studying academic courses and vocational courses is narrowing. This is due to ensuring that learners are now studying appropriate courses as well as an improvement in attendance. The number of learners successfully following A-level courses has increased rapidly. Attendance is high. Work seen in lessons confirms that learners are making good progress.
- The sixth form provides a rich curriculum which is carefully matched to individual prior attainment, aspirations and capability. The 'Traineeship' pathway provides a route for learners who did not attain a Grade C in English or mathematics. All learners have success in this area either through retaking GCSE and improving their grades or through studying functional skills qualifications.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Learners receive regular and detailed feedback on their progress. In a business studies lesson the teacher gave individuals clear explanations of how to improve and how to gain more marks on the A level practice paper. In most lessons teachers have high expectations and set challenging activities. They provide effective support for disabled learners and those with special educational needs, thus helping them to make good progress in lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and learners are excellent. Learners spoke highly of their teachers, who are always willing to help.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. The progress of learners is tracked rigorously and if a learner falls behind with their studies swift action is taken to help them catch up. Leaders ensure that sixth form learners learn in a safe environment. Learners have a clear understanding of how to stay safe online.
- Learners receive high-quality careers advice and support with their university and job applications. Every learner has an assigned senior leader who oversees applications. Higher achieving learners are encouraged to apply to top Russell Group universities. Almost every learner progresses to university, other training or employment.

- Sixth form learners are positive role models for younger pupils. They help to coach pupils in personalised learning programmes and take a lead with promoting learner voice. For example, learners named their houses to reflect British values. They develop their leadership skills via a range of activities such as health ambassadors and being part of the learner leadership team. Some learners lead well with learning behaviour, for example making full use of their study time. A few have not yet mastered the ability to make effective notes or learn unaided.

School details

Unique reference number	135897
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10001937

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	14–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	576
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Principal	Douglas Lawson (Executive Principal), Gary Smith (Head of Upper Academy)
Telephone number	01268 552536
Website	www.basildonacademies.org.uk
Email address	admin@basildonacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2013

Information about this school

- Basildon Upper Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Numbers in the sixth form are increasing year on year.
- 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 September 2014.
- In 2013, the academy was removed from special measures (where schools fail to give their pupils an acceptable standard of education).
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with a below average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- Around half the pupils in Key Stage 4 are eligible for the pupil premium funding. This is a much higher proportion than in most schools.
- In 2015, the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 11.
- In previous years the academy has entered pupils early in mathematics and English literature with varying success.
- At the time of this inspection, there were no pupils being educated off-site.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made a series of longer and shorter visits to lessons to observe learning, undertook a learning walk, looked at work in pupils' books and evaluated the academy's performance information. The learning walk and several observations were undertaken with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with a representative from the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body, executive principal, head of upper academy, senior leaders, middle leaders and three groups of pupils. Inspectors also spoke informally to pupils around the site and in lessons.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including: planning and monitoring documents; the academy development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information and staff training.
- Inspectors took account of 36 pupil responses to the online questionnaire, 42 staff questionnaires, one response on Parent View and the academy's recent survey of parents.

Inspection team

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Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector
Vanessa Love	Ofsted Inspector

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