

Basildon Lower Academy

Timberlog Close, Basildon SS14 1UX

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good academy

- Significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning have been secured since the previous inspection. Governors and academy leaders have been uncompromising in their clear focus on improving the experience for pupils in the classroom.
- Teachers plan systematically to meet the needs of pupils. They mark and assess work rigorously, giving both them and pupils a detailed understanding of the progress that is being made.
- Pupils are making strong progress from their different starting points because teaching is challenging, and because effective support and help are put in place quickly when it is required.
- Leaders have worked closely with families to improve the attendance of pupils at the academy. Fewer pupils are absent or excluded because effective preventative monitoring and support are in place.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders have taken effective action to add new subjects and approaches, while ensuring that key literacy, mathematics and communication skills are taught in a systematic way across subject areas.
- The academy cares for pupils well and they generally feel supported and safe. There are frequent opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements and to foster tolerant, respectful attitudes and relationships.

It is not yet an outstanding academy because

- The behaviour of a few pupils in a small minority of lessons can fall short of expectations.
- The academy's provision for career-related learning is not as well developed as it could be.
- Although the progress pupils make in mathematics is improving rapidly, achievement is not as strong as it is in subjects such as English and history.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen the impact of the new approaches to teaching by:
 - ensuring that pupils always understand the feedback and guidance they receive, particularly in mathematics, and that they act on it more consistently to improve their work
 - improving the information provided to parents about the academy's approaches to teaching and the progress their children are making
 - providing better guidance, examples and instruction when approaching written tasks.
- Eradicate the few remaining examples of poor behaviour by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of behaviour, and the support given to teachers, pupils and parents, are more effective.
- Ensure that pupils are better prepared for the next stages of learning and work by:
 - improving the range of opportunities for career-related learning and impartial advice and guidance that pupils receive.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive principal and the head of the academy have focused relentlessly upon improving the progress and outcomes for pupils. As a result, the overall quality of teaching in the academy has been transformed in a relatively short space of time. The academy is now providing a good quality education to its pupils.
- Leaders have introduced effective systems to ensure that high-quality teaching and good progress become the consistent experience for pupils. The academy has applied a rigorous framework for planning and assessing learning against clear objectives in all subjects. This system is supporting much more focused and precise planning by teachers, and an acceleration in the acquisition of knowledge and skills by pupils.
- The celebration of pupils' achievements and the provision of a wide range of personal development and enrichment opportunities are central to the approach leaders have taken. Pupils' good attendance, personal achievements, participation in house events or membership of the pupil executive are all recognised through bright displays and badges worn proudly on blazers. Pupils feel listened to and are proud of their academy.
- Improvements to teaching have been secured because leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of provision closely. This is supported by a good range of training opportunities that are valued by staff. Leaders challenge underperformance robustly and link pay progression closely to both pupils' achievement and teachers' professional development.
- Middle leaders are successfully driving many of the improvements to pupils' progress by ensuring that provision in subject areas is consistently strong. They provide good support and a 'buddy' system for new teachers, encourage the sharing of resources and best practice, and carefully standardise the way that pupils' work is marked and assessed.
- The support provided to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is systematic and effective. Teachers plan well to meet their needs, and a wide range of one-to-one or small-group activities are run to boost their basic skills. Outcomes for these pupils have improved markedly because their needs are being closely tracked and leaders use associated funding, resources and strategies effectively.
- The head of the academy has been determined in his approach to improving the curriculum. Pupils now follow 'express' and 'nurture' curriculum routes that are ensuring that specialist teaching closely matches particular needs. Subjects such as food technology and French have been added to broaden the range of skills and knowledge covered. The traditional academic subjects are therefore balanced by a range of practical and arts-based subjects.
- The curriculum develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. There is a culture in lessons of encouraging respectful debate and discussion. Inspectors also saw this applied in an impactful assembly reflecting on and discussing British identity in the wake of recent terrorist attacks. A range of faiths, cultures and beliefs are explored through religious education and citizenship lessons, and pupils feel that the academy is a tolerant and supportive environment.
- Leaders have applied a range of strategies and additional resources to ensure that pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding make progress that is similar to that of other pupils. The use of this funding is tracked carefully and additional support directed where it is found to be needed.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe is systematic and well managed. Staff are trained effectively in the identification and reporting of risk. The most vulnerable pupils receive good support through provision such as the 'return to learn' centre, and the academy's liaison with other agencies is effective.
- Some of the information the academy provides to parents and other stakeholders is not as useful or detailed as it could be. For example, the academy's website lacks clear information about homework expectations or how teachers and subject areas assess pupils. Similarly, the reports that go home to parents are not as helpful as they could be in explaining the progress that pupils are making.
- **The governance of the academy**
 - Governors hold the academy leadership to robust account over the delivery of high standards. They are a regular presence in the academy, meeting with leaders and visiting lessons themselves to check on the progress being made by pupils. As a result, they are very knowledgeable about the quality of provision and understand well the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Where they find that strategic planning does not meet their vision for rapid improvement, they successfully challenge

leaders to sharpen actions or seek more ambitious outcomes.

- Although the governing body is comparatively small, members possess a wide range of expertise and seek additional information or training from academy leaders or outside agencies when required. They take appropriate oversight of the academy's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is well planned, engaging and challenging. Teachers apply the academy's five 'non-negotiable' teaching strategies and structures consistently to ensure a friendly and purposeful learning climate in which the large majority of pupils achieve well.
- Teachers use a common system to explicitly identify the skills or knowledge being taught, and to clearly assess pupils against. This is providing very effective information to help teachers plan appropriate catch-up activities and for pupils to focus their revision.
- Teachers develop the reading and communication skills of pupils well. All pupils regularly read independently in class, and inspectors saw a number of examples of pupils engaging well with challenging texts. Reading skills are regularly taught and assessed, and the academy's library and reading programmes are popular with pupils.
- Teachers communicate well with pupils. They develop good relationships, use questions effectively, and encourage discussion and debate. For example, in history and English lessons pupils willingly and supportively share their ideas verbally. They are regularly encouraged to reflect on or analyse the historical knowledge they have gained or the writing techniques being used by an author.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and helpfully in all areas of the academy, in line with the academy's policy. However, feedback is not always delivered plainly and clearly enough for pupils to understand. For example, in some comments teachers use words to prompt pupils that pupils do not yet understand. As a result, the significant time teachers spend marking does not always lead to pupils making improvements as effectively as they might.
- Teachers routinely focus on spelling and punctuation through their teaching and marking. As a result, inspectors saw many examples in different subjects of pupils correcting and improving their work. However, in some lessons, pupils lack clear enough guidance or structural support to compose more successful written responses. As a result, written work can sometimes be too brief or lack depth, with expectations around presentation sometimes unclear.
- Homework is used effectively and regularly to support learning. An online homework management system is used effectively in some subjects, and regular spelling or key word tests help secure and widen pupils' vocabulary in subjects such as French and religious education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe and well looked after in the academy. The academy site is welcoming, secure and well supervised by clearly visible staff. Pupils wear security badges to identify themselves and access secure areas of the academy, and are provided with a wide range of activities or quiet spaces to occupy them at break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils are well informed about how to stay safe online because they are taught about it explicitly in lessons as well as through presentations by outside agencies and older pupils. They have a clear understanding of the different forms of abuse and bullying, and the academy ensures that they are knowledgeable about how to report concerns and keep themselves safe.
- The academy is promoting healthy lifestyles effectively and offering a wide range of free sporting opportunities effectively through its collaboration with Sport England. Other well-developed collaborations such as the 'Premier League into schools' scheme are helping to regularly expose pupils to inspiring role models and mentors.

- The academy's work to improve the attitudes and conduct of pupils towards each other has been effective in significantly reducing incidents of bullying to a very low level, although rare incidents do still occur that can be distressing for pupils and parents. The academy operates a range of well-designed strategies to combat bullying, in which the very large majority of pupils have confidence.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are generally considerate and polite. Because the teaching is good, the large majority of lessons are calm and purposeful, enabling pupils to learn free from low-level disruption. Whether they are required to work independently or as part of a group, pupils are usually cooperative and kind, demonstrating impressive effort.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the academy. The transition between lessons is typically smooth and calm. Pupils take pride in the environment and littering is rare; displays and classrooms are kept bright and tidy.
- The overall attendance of pupils at the academy has improved significantly in recent years and is now around the national average. Similarly, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from the academy has reduced to around the national average. Arrangements for tracking attendance and supporting families are robust.
- The enthusiasm for learning, displayed by the large majority of pupils, is not evident in the attitudes of a very small minority. Although incidents of pupils being removed from lessons or excluded from the academy for a fixed period have declined substantially, in some lessons teachers do not consistently apply the academy's systems, which affects pupils' behaviour and limits their progress.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils are now making rapid progress from their starting points in almost all areas because there has been a relentless focus on improvement in this area. Ambitious but flexible targets based on the prior ability of pupils are shared with pupils, and regular assessment works effectively to check that those targets are being met. Where they are not, rapid action is taken to enable catch-up or provide additional support.
- Pupils are making accelerated progress in English as a result of very effective teaching. All pupils are given appropriate reading books, and challenging resources and homework tasks are targeted at their personal areas for development. Teachers emphasise clearly the skills and knowledge pupils will need to make progress and, consequently, pupils are often working at a level in advance of what might be expected.
- Most-able pupils are being effectively challenged by well-planned teaching and enrichment opportunities. Initiatives such as the 'Brilliant club' and the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) group are engaging pupils intellectually and raising their aspirations through participation in speaking competitions and visits to top universities. In lessons, effective questioning and well-planned activities ensure that they are developing higher-level knowledge and skills systematically.
- Outcomes for disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs are good because a wide range of support and interventions are in place to help support them, and because teachers receive detailed information about their needs and plan accordingly. As a result, the progress they make from their different starting points is similar to that made by other pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made significantly improved progress since 2013 as a result of improved teaching and targeted support, aided by the additional pupil premium funding the academy receives. The difference, or 'gap', between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and that made by other pupils in the academy is now very small in Year 9. In Years 7 and 8 the gap has effectively closed.
- In mathematics, an effective new curriculum and a number of new teachers are now ensuring that pupils are making strong progress from their different starting points. Years 8 and 9 are rapidly catching up on slower progress made in earlier years due to less effective teaching.
- A helpful programme of activities to smooth transition to Basildon Upper Academy is in place, but the academy's provision for impartial information, advice and guidance around careers and work-related learning is less well developed.

School details

Unique reference number	135895
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10001936

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	446
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Les Livermore
Principal	Douglas Lawson (executive principal) Simon Wilson (head)
Telephone number	01268 552536
Website	www.basildonacademies.org.uk
Email address	admin@basildonacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2013

Information about this academy

- Basildon Lower Academy opened in September 2009, at the same time as Basildon Upper Academy. Although separate schools, the academies share many administrative functions, governance and some key leadership roles as part of the Basildon Academies Trust.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized school and only admits pupils aged 11–14. The current executive principal has been in post since September 2014 and the current head of the academy has been in post since January 2015.
- Most pupils are White British and speak English as their first language.
- More than half the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support pupils who are in the care of the local authority or who are known to be eligible for free school meals), which is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The academy does not use any alternative provision to educate its pupils. The academy occasionally supports pupils through the use of home tuition.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in 32 lessons in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these observations were conducted jointly with the head of the academy or with other members of the academy leadership team. Inspectors also observed a range of intervention, enrichment activities and an assembly taking place.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, the governing body, academy leaders, teachers, support staff and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of academy documentation including that relating to policies, the minutes of governors' meetings, annual review documents, self-evaluation documents, pupil achievement, behaviour and attendance data, and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in nine responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 38 questionnaires returned by academy staff, and 53 responses to an online pupil survey. Inspectors also held telephone conversations with some parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the academy uses, including the website and information sent to parents and other stakeholders.
- Inspectors visited Basildon Upper Academy to scrutinise records and documentation kept there that relate to Basildon Lower Academy.

Inspection team

Richard Spencer, lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Andrew Hemmings	Ofsted Inspector
Joanna Jones	Ofsted Inspector

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