

Barnwell School

Barnwell, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9SW

Inspection dates 19–20 January 2016

Overall effectiveness **Requires improvement**

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Too many pupils do not make sufficient progress from their different starting points in key academic subjects such as English, history, science and languages.
- Much of the teaching does not sufficiently challenge pupils to secure good outcomes. Pupils can find their work too easy. Some lessons can lack the pace and urgency required to ensure progress is sufficient.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' work do not always have the impact they should in terms of identifying weaknesses, securing improvements and informing planning.
- Improvements in provision for disadvantaged pupils secured since the last inspection have been too slow. The additional funding intended to support them has not had the impact that it should. Disadvantaged pupils make less progress from their different starting points than other pupils nationally.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make less progress from their different starting points than similar pupils nationally.

The school has the following strengths

- The overall attainment of pupils at GCSE rose in 2015.
- Leaders have secured impressive improvements to pupils' behaviour, personal development and welfare. Attendance has improved, and the vast majority of pupils and parents are very supportive of the school.
- Sixth form provision is good. Student numbers are rising because of a varied curriculum offer and effective teaching. Outcomes for vocational qualifications are particularly impressive.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics as a result of effective teaching and a well-planned programme of catch-up and support.
- Middle leaders, many of whom are relatively newly appointed, have a clear understanding of what is needed to secure improvement and are beginning to deliver better teaching and outcomes.
- Governors provide effective challenge and support to school leaders and understand the school's priorities for improvement well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment and questioning more systematically to inform planning and challenge pupils
 - using feedback more effectively to direct pupils towards making improvements.

- Improve the outcomes for pupils in key subject areas by:
 - strengthening the teaching of key subject areas where outcomes are not yet good overall
 - ensuring that all pupils at risk of underachieving receive timely and effective support to secure good outcomes.

- Improve the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan lessons that meet their needs and promote their good progress
 - directing associated funding, resources and support more directly and exclusively towards meeting their needs and supporting their progress
 - widening the range of pupils who access support
 - widening the range of subjects for which additional support is provided
 - working closely with families and other agencies to improve the attendance of those who are persistently absent from school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **is good**

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and a very clear vision for the school. His strategic plan for the school is extremely detailed and sets out clear, appropriate actions to secure further improvements. School leaders share this vision and are motivated and energetic; they are implementing a wide range of actions effectively, many of which are beginning to deliver results. Overall attainment at GCSE rose in 2015, and provision in the sixth form is good and improving.
- Although teaching and outcomes are not yet good, very effective middle leadership is successfully delivering improvements by sharing good practice and ensuring that planning, assessment and support for pupils is more consistent. Despite many of them being relatively new in post, middle leaders have good knowledge of their areas of responsibility because they monitor and evaluate the impact of their work regularly and systematically. Where they identify underperformance, they are taking swift and effective action.
- The raising of pupils' aspirations, and the provision of a wide range of personal development and enrichment opportunities, are central to the approach leaders have taken. Adjustments to the school day have been used productively to enable a high proportion of pupils to access enrichment activities such as enterprise, music, drama and sporting clubs. Pupils are also keen to participate in additional revision, catch-up and homework sessions targeted at those most in need of support. As a result, pupils and parents are increasingly proud of the school, and attendance has risen.
- The school's curriculum is well balanced and provides pupils with a good range of subjects and experiences. In addition to the traditional academic subjects, a broad range of practical, creative and vocational subjects prepare pupils well for the next stage of their employment, education or training. Pupils enjoy a very wide range of 16–19 curriculum choices as a result of the 'Stevenage Sixth' consortium arrangement with other local schools.
- In June 2015, school leaders engaged an external review of the use of the additional pupil premium funding the school receives to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. A number of appropriate actions and strategies have subsequently been put in place. They have not yet had time to take full effect, but leaders are clearly demonstrating the capacity and determination to deliver the improvement needed.
- Performance management systems challenge teachers robustly to ensure that they are developing their practice. As a result, the pupils are making better progress. Leaders have ensured that a good range of professional development and training opportunities are available to staff. For example, all staff have been trained in coaching techniques and many have engaged in the recent 'GO Barnwell' programme to develop and share best teaching practice.
- Pupils in Year 7 who receive additional funding to catch up to the expected standards of achievement receive strong additional support through a range of effective measures. As a result, they are making rapid progress towards reaching those expected levels.
- Leaders draw very effectively upon a wide range of external support. The local authority has provided extensive advice, challenge and support to senior and middle leaders on improving the curriculum and raising achievement. The school has also developed good links with local teaching schools and other networks to access training and professional development opportunities for staff.
- Opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding are well embedded across lessons, assemblies and tutorial periods. For example, inspectors observed pupils reflecting very maturely on the meaning and importance of life goals in an assembly.
- Pupils gain a good understanding of life in modern Britain through ethics lessons in Key Stage 3, and SMSC (social, moral, spiritual and cultural) lessons in Key Stage 4, in which topics and moral questions such as world religions, the nature of democracy and local employment issues are covered.
- The care and welfare of looked-after children who attend the school is effective and well coordinated. Liaison with carers and other agencies is appropriate and regular and they receive good support from designated staff.
- Regular contact is maintained with alternative providers to monitor the progress and well-being of the small number of pupils who attend such provision. The school monitors their attendance and development appropriately. They make good progress, securing appropriate qualifications and further education, employment or training destinations.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors understand the school’s strengths and areas of weakness well and challenge school leaders effectively. They have undertaken an audit of their own skills and areas of expertise, securing advice and training where needs have been identified. They set a clear strategic direction for the school and are supporting leaders as they make continued improvements.
- Governors demonstrate great passion and commitment to the school. They are proud of the improvements the school has made and have high aspirations and expectations. They hold leaders to account robustly, challenging them to provide detailed improvement plans and asking searching questions around issues such as attendance and the progress of disadvantaged pupils. They are knowledgeable about the performance of pupils and maintain good lines of communication with school leaders to monitor progress through the year.
- Governors fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. They are trained and knowledgeable about procedures and risks, and are kept well informed through regular meetings held with the school’s leaders to check safeguarding arrangements.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures are clear and given high prominence around the school and through the website. Staff are all well trained and knowledgeable about the potential risks to children and how to report and act upon concerns. Procedures and actions to support vulnerable pupils are coordinated and administered well, with effective liaison in place with other agencies. The school has fully implemented the government’s latest guidance on the ‘Prevent’ strategy (government advice to schools to have due regard to the need to identify signs of extremism and radicalisation).
- A comprehensive range of risk assessments are undertaken and regularly reviewed, and very thorough procedures are in place for checking the suitability of adults working in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- Teachers at Barnwell plan lessons and provide feedback to pupils in increasingly consistent and collaborative ways. However, teaching does not always provide sufficient challenge to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable. In a number of lessons, pupils either find the work too easy, or there is insufficient structure and guidance to enable them to engage deeply with their learning.
- When planning lessons, teachers do not usually take sufficient account of the progress different pupils are making. As a result, questioning and task-setting is not always well matched to the needs of the pupils, often slowing the pace of learning. For example, in some subjects the most-able pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding by engaging in suitably challenging writing activities.
- Pupils usually respond well to the regular feedback they receive from their teachers in line with the school’s policy, and the work in their books is generally well presented as a result. In some subjects, for example in sociology, pupils act upon their teachers’ concise directions to impressive effect. The impact of the feedback varies quite widely, however, because it does not always lead to pupils making improvements to their work.
- A combination of well-planned activities and focused questioning now more frequently challenges and engages the pupils. This was seen in one very effective physical education lesson where pupils made good use of computer software to assess their trampolining skills. The ensuing discussion led to pupils making marked improvements to their technique.
- Homework, set in line with the school’s policy, is used effectively to consolidate and deepen learning. Pupils find the system used easy to manage, and they and their parents feel that the amount of homework set is appropriate.
- Initiatives for improving pupils’ reading skills are developing a culture of reading in the school. The libraries are popular and well resourced, and all pupils benefit through their regular reading sessions. Well-targeted support helps pupils in Key Stage 3 to improve their reading ability and enjoyment. English teachers cover a varied range of challenging texts, carefully chosen to reflect the wide range of cultures and traditions found in modern Britain.
- Mathematics teaching is generally effective in developing pupils’ knowledge and understanding. Teachers demonstrate a range of different calculation methods and develop pupils’ skills through effective questioning and task-setting.

- Teachers communicate well with pupils and apply whole-school systems for managing behaviour consistently. As a result, relationships are warm and pupils commit to their work willingly in the vast majority of lessons; disruption to learning is rare.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe and well looked after in the school; a confidence that is shared by the vast majority of parents. Pupils are well supervised at break and lunchtimes and have confidence in the ability of staff to help and support them should they experience any problems. Pupils wear their smart uniforms with pride and are tolerant and supportive of one another. Racist and homophobic incidents are very rare, and the small minority of pupils who choose to cover their heads, or who are from minority ethnic groups, feel comfortable and accepted.
- The school celebrates pupils' achievements well and provides a number of opportunities for them to develop leadership skills. Displays of exceptional work and enrichment activities are hung proudly in the corridors. Pupils in the middle school value the competition that the college system drives, as well as the support that they feel they can access from the college leaders.
- The school's PRIDE (passionate, resilient, innovative, determined and empathetic) initiative is used very effectively in promoting good personal development. Teachers regularly identify and plan for the development of these qualities in lessons, and leaders guide pupils to reflect upon them in assembly and tutorial periods. It is successfully driving a culture in which pupils are encouraged to 'Take PRIDE in all you do and be proud of your successes'.
- Pupils are well informed about how to stay safe online because they are taught about it explicitly in lessons as well as through presentations and assemblies. They have a clear understanding of the different forms of abuse and bullying, and the school ensures they are knowledgeable about how to report concerns and keep themselves safe. Bullying is very rare and the large majority of parents and pupils have confidence in the school's response when it does take place.
- The school has an effective programme of impartial careers advice and guidance. Events take place throughout the year at which employers and further education and apprenticeship providers contribute to the pupils' understanding of their future career options. Some pupils take advantage of the opportunity to take part in work-related learning placements, and impartial advice meetings are provided for pupils. As a result, very few pupils fail to secure appropriate further education, employment or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The large majority of lessons are calm and purposeful, enabling pupils to learn free from low-level disruption. Pupils are usually cooperative and kind, listening to each other respectfully and demonstrating impressive effort. Rare incidents of poor behaviour are effectively tackled using a well-understood and consistently applied system of consequences.
- Pupils, parents and staff share high levels of appreciation for the improvements to behaviour that have been secured in recent years. The clear systems for managing behaviour and rewarding exceptional effort with 'PRIDE points' are appreciated and have contributed to a significant reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusion and removal from lessons.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school. The transition between lessons and between the two sites 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 to school has improved steadily in the last year and is now around the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from the school is reducing, although it remains higher than average. The school has effective and rigorous systems in place to work with families to improve attendance.
- The school tracks punctuality in the morning and follows up lateness with firm sanctions. The approach they are taking is steadily improving punctuality in the morning, although a few pupils still arrive late too often.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- At Key Stage 4, the overall progress pupils made from their different starting points was below average in 2015, and significantly below average in a number of key subject areas such as English, history, science and modern languages. Current performance information indicates that improvements are underway, but these are not yet secure or rapid enough.
- From their various starting points, disadvantaged pupils in the school make less progress in English and mathematics than other pupils nationally. However, there are some signs of improvement: the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who secured five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C rose in 2015 and is moving closer to the national average for other pupils. Current performance information indicates that the gap between the progress they make and other pupils nationally will narrow in 2016.
- In 2015, the overall progress across subjects made by the most-able pupils was below that of similar pupils nationally. The school's own performance information indicates that the most-able pupils currently in Year 11 are making slightly improved progress, but inspectors saw little evidence that outcomes for these pupils would improve substantially in 2016.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make less progress from their different starting points than other pupils in the school. Some improvements to their overall progress were secured in 2015 due to a range of appropriate strategies and support that have been put in place, but the teaching they receive is not currently targeted enough to fully meet their needs.
- The overall attainment of pupils improved in 2015. The proportion of pupils who secured five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C was approaching the national average. Current performance information indicates that the improvement in this measure of attainment is generally secure in current year groups.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving steadily as a result of more effective teaching. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who made the expected progress from their starting points was in line with the national average. Similarly, their overall attainment at GCSE was in line with the national average. These improvements are secure and likely to be improved upon further in 2016.
- Achievement in English was disappointing in 2015, with pupils making much less progress than the national average. However, there are clear signs of emerging improvement in current year groups as a result of more effective teaching, learning and assessment.
- Pupils are achieving particularly well in sports studies, information technology and sociology as a result of effective teaching and assessment. In 2015, attainment in these subjects was better than the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils securing grades A* to C at GCSE.
- A new system of measuring pupils' achievement over time has recently been introduced in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. Early indications are that it is providing teachers with useful information to inform planning, and leaders are reviewing its impact on pupil outcomes closely. The school's performance information shows that patterns of achievement in mathematics and English are improving in Key Stage 3, although too much variability in progress persists between teaching groups.
- Pupils are well informed about the next stage of their education, training or employment. Very few pupils do not secure further education, training or employment because the school provides a strong programme of support, working effectively with employers and further education providers to ensure a good provision of impartial information, advice and guidance.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners entering the sixth form are able to choose from a wide range of vocational and academic courses from which to construct appropriate study programmes. Those following vocational courses make better progress from their various starting points than the national average in most subjects. The progress made by learners following academic courses is in line with the national average in most subject areas.
- Leaders monitor the progress of learners carefully and ensure that support is put in place where they are at risk of not making sufficient progress. As a result, learner numbers are rising and the proportion who remain in the sixth form and succeed on their programmes of study is high. Learners have a good

understanding of the progress they are making because they receive regular feedback. The relatively small number of less advantaged learners in receipt of 16–19 bursary funding make progress that is better than their peers on average.

- Teaching in the sixth form is generally more effective than that found in the rest of the school. Teachers use their subject knowledge and regular assessment of learners to plan lessons that challenge and engage them. For example, in psychology lessons, learners are provided with very clear and helpful guidance and feedback about how to structure effective essays. Consequently, learners make marked improvements on the quality of their extended writing. In mathematics lessons, learners are making significant progress due to teachers' effective questioning of individuals and helpful demonstrations of different methods and rules.
- The school carefully monitors and tracks the progress of learners leaving the sixth form, and an increasing proportion are progressing successfully to higher education or further training. The sixth form provides an effective programme of relevant and impartial support, advice and guidance to help them make decisions and applications for future destinations.
- The school makes effective provision for learners to undertake work experience and engage in work-related learning. Learners are guided to arrange placements, many of which have a strong influence upon their higher education, employment or training choices. For example, a number of learners have worked in local partner primary schools and are considering a career in teaching as a result.
- Sixth form learners set an example to the rest of the school with their excellent behaviour and attendance. They are friendly and cooperative, and the sixth form study area is a calm working environment. Overall attendance is higher than that lower down in the school. However, arrangements for monitoring and challenging learners whose long-term attendance declines are not as well developed.
- Learners appreciate the varied opportunities that are offered to them in the sixth form. A wide range of trips and visits enrich their learning, and many gain valuable additional skills by taking part in activities such as enterprise projects and training as sports coaches.
- Any learners entering the sixth form without a good pass in GCSE English or mathematics receive lessons and support to enable them to secure this vital qualification. Outcomes for these students are improving, with a high proportion of students securing improved results in the November resits.
- Effective liaison and collaboration between the four schools in the 'Stevenage Sixth' consortium ensures that the progress of learners attending other schools for some of their courses is closely monitored.

School details

Unique reference number	117518
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10001899

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,189
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mel Edwards
Headteacher	Anthony Fitzpatrick
Telephone number	01438 222500
Website	www.barnwellschool.co.uk
Email address	info@barnwell.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 December 2013

Information about this school

- Barnwell School is larger than the average secondary school and is located in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. It operates across two sites: the 'Middle School' mostly accommodates Years 7–9, while the 'Upper School' is the base for Years 10–13. It has a sixth form that operates within a consortium of four local schools known as 'Stevenage Sixth'. The current headteacher has been in post since 2012.
- The large majority of pupils are White British, with a smaller proportion than average coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support pupils who are looked after or who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is slightly higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly in line with the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school educates a small number of pupils at the North Herts Education Support Centre and the Stevenage Education Support Centre specialist provision.
- The school runs two specialist provision units for a small number of pupils with education, health and care plans. These resources specialise in provision for pupils with specific learning needs and visual impairment.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 58 lessons in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with members of the academy's leadership team. Inspectors also observed small-group sessions, tutorial periods and assemblies.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, school leaders, teachers, support staff, representatives of the local authority's school improvement team, the Chair of Governors, and various groups of pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including that relating to: policies, the minutes of governing body meetings, annual review, self-evaluation, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance data, and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 74 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 64 questionnaires returned by school staff.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with leaders at alternative providers used by the school to educate a small proportion of their pupils, and with leaders at other schools within the 16–19 consortium 'Stevenage Sixth'.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

Richard Spencer, lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
Kevin Sadler	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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