

Great Barr School

Aldridge Road, Great Barr, Birmingham B44 8NU

Inspection dates

28–29 June 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	Requires 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

- Last year, pupils in Year 11 underachieved in their examinations. Fewer pupils than nationally achieved five grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, at GCSE.
- In mathematics, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not achieved as well as other pupils nationally.
- Good new teachers have not been in post long enough to remedy previous levels of underachievement.
- The quality of teaching, although rapidly improving, is not yet consistently good across subjects and within some subjects.
- Teachers do not plan learning which is sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils. Consequently, the progress these pupils make is not rapid enough.
- Guidance and direction from teachers in some lessons does not ensure that all pupils are clear about what they need to do to achieve as well as they can.
- Although persistent absence rates have fallen since the last inspection, overall attendance is still not high enough to help pupils to make good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors bring ambition, enthusiasm and high expectations to the school.
- Senior and subject leaders work well as a team and are taking effective action to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- Leaders are bringing about important improvements in key areas of the school's work and focus on raising pupils' aspirations to do well.
- The positive relationships between pupils and teachers help pupils to make progress.
- Pupils now make progress in English which matches that of pupils nationally. Progress is also improving in mathematics.
- Governors know the school well. They make good use of information on the quality of teaching and information on pupils' progress to hold the school to account.
- Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils respect each other regardless of their background or gender.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that all groups of pupils in the main school and the sixth form, including those supported by pupil premium funding and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress which is at least good.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - sharing the best practice within the school, so that teachers plan and deliver challenging lessons that are closely matched to all pupils' needs and abilities and particularly the most able.
- Continue to drive improvements in attendance, particularly by working with families of pupils who are frequently absent from school, so that the attendance of all pupils is improved further and thereby supports them to make better progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, who was appointed just less than a year ago, demonstrates consistently strong leadership. Together with her senior team, some of whom are also new, she has successfully managed a large financial deficit and appointed new subject leaders. The headteacher and her team have been very effective in making sure that the school is now working with energy, enthusiasm and rigour to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders have worked with a clear focus to improve the accountability of all staff. As a result, more pupils in school now are making good progress. All staff are held to account for pupils' progress and achievement, and staff are working together to build a culture of strong learning based on an ethos of higher aspirations for all pupils in school.
- The quality of subject leadership has strengthened since the last inspection. The appointment of strong teachers means that standards are rising rapidly in English and are improving in mathematics.
- Subject leaders have welcomed the new structures, rigour and accountability for their work. This means that the whole school has a determined focus on improving outcomes for all pupils. These leaders, including those in the sixth form, undertake regular checks on pupils' progress to make sure they can quickly identify pupils who are not doing as well as they should and give them the support they need.
- The school's assessment system is becoming more effective as teachers' skills in evaluating progress get better. As a result, teachers know which pupils are on track and can give extra help to those pupils who are falling behind. This work has had a positive impact on the progress of pupils in school and has helped to narrow the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.
- The appointment of a new leader in mathematics has led to standards beginning to improve in this subject. An example of pupils' improved progress in mathematics was seen being celebrated during the inspection, when pupils were recognised for their success in a national mathematics challenge.
- Leaders have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. Their improvement plans are focused clearly on identified areas of weakness and the school is well supported by a local training school and the Birmingham Education Partnership. The school also uses independent sources to ensure that appropriate challenge is given to its work. This contributes well to the improved progress that pupils in school now are making.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of all aspects of the school's work including the quality of teaching in the school. A local training school helps to develop teachers' practice and to make sure that the school's assessments are accurate. Leaders give precise and specific feedback to teachers about the strengths of their teaching and where it needs to improve. However, there are still inconsistencies in some subject areas, where teaching does not always meet the needs of all groups of learners as well as it could.
- Leaders also use information about how well pupils are learning to identify the training and development needs of teachers and support staff in order to ensure that teaching improves. Underperforming staff are challenged strongly and teachers' responsibilities and pay awards are linked closely to the progress pupils make.
- Good use is made of additional funds to support improvement in pupils' outcomes. Pupils who enter the school with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills in Year 7 are given support to catch up to the expected levels. The school makes increasingly good use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils, and gaps in achievement between this group of pupils and their classmates are now closing.
- A broad and balanced curriculum develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. The curriculum, both for the main school and for the sixth form, is reviewed regularly to make sure it meets pupils' needs. Pupils receive impartial careers guidance which helps to prepare them well for the choices they have to make at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and in the sixth form. A high proportion of pupils go on to further education or training and employment at the end of Year 11.
- The school effectively promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through lessons, religious education and assemblies. A broad programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is delivered through specific lessons and other whole-school learning activities. This supports pupils' personal development very effectively. This programme enables pupils to experience social and cultural diversity and appreciate the values of respect, tolerance and equality of opportunity. This also helps pupils to prepare well for adult life in modern Britain.

- Great Barr is a Stonewall Education Champion school which offers support and guidance in tackling homophobic and gender discrimination. The school's work to eliminate discrimination has had considerable impact in making sure that pupils respect every individual. Pupils were keen to emphasise that the school is a community that welcomes and appreciates everyone's differences.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are skilled and experienced and provide effective oversight of the school's work. They know the school's strengths and what is required to improve. As a result, they hold leaders to account rigorously for pupils' performance. They make regular and focused visits to the school and check the accuracy of information for themselves. These checks are recorded so that the school's improvement can be tracked systematically.
 - Governors challenge leaders when subjects are not performing as well as they would expect.
 - Governors understand arrangements for performance management, including that of the headteacher, and they scrutinise pay awards carefully. These are linked to pupils' attainment.
 - Governors know how the school's additional funding is spent and they check on the impact this has on improving outcomes for pupils. They have also been prudent and effective in preparing a balanced budget.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Practices in school, including record-keeping, are robust and efficient. The school has appropriate procedures to deal with any concerns about pupils' welfare, and governors monitor the school's practice regularly and make sure that all requirements are up to date. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure in school and parents agree that their children are safe. All staff have been trained on what to do if a concern regarding the safety and welfare of a pupil is raised and the school works closely with other outside agencies. As a result, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- There has been a legacy of poor teaching in mathematics which has adversely affected pupils' progress over time. Teaching in mathematics is still variable for all groups of pupils and school leaders are working hard to address this.
- The appointment of a new subject leader in mathematics is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the gaps in pupils' prior knowledge and skills are now reducing. From work seen in pupils' books and the school's assessment information, pupils are now making better progress over time than at the time of the last inspection.
- Learning activities and questioning in some lessons across the curriculum do not stretch the most able pupils to do their best work. At other times, learning is not as effective as it should be because pupils are not clear about what they are expected to do. For example, teachers do not use examples of high-quality work to support pupils whose understanding is limited. These pupils do not have enough opportunities to demonstrate the skills and knowledge appropriate for their age and abilities.
- Teachers' training and development are tightly focused on the school's improvement priorities. Professional targets set for teachers are linked carefully to the progress pupils make. Teaching is therefore improving and, as a result, pupils' overall progress is speeding up. However, the stronger practice which exists in some departments is not consistently shared with all in order to ensure that the quality of teaching is good or better in all subjects.
- Teachers' planning usually takes into account pupils' prior learning so that resources and tasks are well matched to pupils' starting points. Most teachers have high expectations so that pupils remain on task and can work well for extended periods. For example, in a very effective geography lesson about the water cycle, pupils of all abilities used a variety of exciting and high-level resources presented through a range of media, which kept pupils focused and interested and challenged them to think deeply about the topic.

- Pupils are able to talk confidently about what they are learning and an example of this was seen in an English lesson, where pupils were considering how Shakespeare uses language in 'Romeo and Juliet' to show Juliet's changing character. Pupils talked about the range of language and grammar, using key quotations from the text to illustrate their ideas. Pupils also discussed a range of issues about the quality and appropriateness of personal relationships from the play. This contributed well to their understanding of the text as well as their social and moral development. In this lesson, pupils took responsibility for moving their own learning forward. Leaders' own monitoring shows that such examples of good learning are becoming increasingly common.
- The quality of marking and feedback following the school's policy has strengthened considerably since the last inspection. Samples of pupils' work seen during the inspection show that, where the school's policy is used consistently, this has an impact on the good progress pupils now make.
- Teaching assistants are a valuable resource within lessons and they are deployed effectively and work well to support pupils in need of additional support. They work well alongside the teacher to ensure that every pupil is making progress.
- The small numbers of pupils who attend the alternative provision are taught courses that are appropriate to their needs and abilities. These include GCSE courses and programmes designed to enrich their career chances and life skills. The success of these programmes is seen in that most pupils go on to other educational opportunities, training or employment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. A strong ethos of care underpins good practice in school that reinforces pupils' self-esteem and the importance of values in making the right decisions. Pupils talk confidently about this, including British values and this means that pupils understand and appreciate their own diverse school community in which each pupil is respected.
- The school's alternative curriculum entitlement (ACE) unit supports all pupils, whatever their individual learning and personal development needs, but particularly those pupils at most risk. The positive relationships that exist help pupils to focus on the many positive opportunities available to them and the strong contribution the unit makes to motivate them to want to do well.
- Pupils are encouraged to think of others and ways to support them, both in school and in the wider community, and pupils support a range of national charities. However, they also think about other ways of showing compassion and supporting others. For example, during the inspection, pupils considered sensitively the importance of organ donation. This systematic approach helps pupils to think deeply about their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and responsibilities as young adults.
- Pupils know the importance of keeping safe and say that they feel very safe in school. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own surveys agree. The school teaches pupils how to stay safe in many respects, including online safety, the dangers of substance abuse and the importance of sexual health.
- The school teaches pupils about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle, including their mental and emotional health through the programme of PSHE. Pupils know whom they should go to if they had any worries or concerns and they say that all pupils in school are accepted for who they are.
- The school anticipates and manages any risk that pupils may be exposed to, including radicalisation or extremism, and monitors this carefully.
- Pupils understand bullying in all its forms and say that it is rare. If bullying of any kind happens, the school deals with it effectively and quickly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are welcoming, helpful, polite and courteous to staff, visitors and to each other.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and the school is usually calm and orderly, both during and between lessons, breaktime and lunchtime. Pupils interact well with each other and with adults.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils listen carefully to others and contribute their ideas in a sensible way. Pupils are usually punctual to lessons, bring the right equipment with them, settle quickly and approach their work with enthusiasm. They look smart and the presentation of their work in books is mostly neat and tidy.

- The school has high expectations for social behaviour among pupils and staff, so that respect and courtesy are seen as integral to the school's ethos as a learning community.
- Pupils know how to behave safely in practical subjects such as science, technology and physical education lessons.
- The use of exclusion for poor behaviour has reduced since the last inspection.
- Improvements in attendance are emerging as new systems are being embedded. Attendance overall is, however, still below the national average. Punctuality to school is good and this reflects pupils' positive attitudes towards learning.
- The improving attendance of pupils who attend the alternative provision is monitored carefully by senior staff. The school makes sure that everyone appreciates the importance of regular attendance and its link with the improving progress that all pupils in school now make.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because until this year, pupils' progress has been too slow. Attainment for those pupils completing Year 11 has not been good enough since the last inspection. In 2015, the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics at grades A* to C declined for the second consecutive year. Too many pupils made limited progress in English and mathematics from the levels of attainment they had reached at the end of key stage 2.
- Many pupils, including the most able, have not achieved as well as they should. Until around a year ago, their progress across the school was not tracked carefully enough and, as a result, the work they were given in lessons often lacked challenge. These pupils have not achieved the highest grades they were capable of at GCSE in a wide range of subjects. However, evidence seen in pupils' books and the school's own assessment information during the inspection confirms that this is now improving.
- There are still gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in school and their peers nationally, although the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in school are now closing slowly.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requires improvement because there remain wide gaps between the achievement of many of these pupils and others nationally. Improved systems now check more carefully how well pupils are doing and provide appropriate and more effective additional support when it is needed.
- The school's most recent analysis of assessment information, moderated by a partner school, suggests that attainment at the end of Year 11 will be better this year. Visits to lessons, evidence from pupils' books and discussions with pupils confirm that pupils are making better progress in all areas of the curriculum. Increasing attention is also given to helping pupils to develop their literacy skills.
- Current subject performance information also shows that pupils are progressing well in a range of subjects at key stage 3 and key stage 4. Pupils now achieve well in English, drama, health and social care, and catering. Attainment and progress in science are very strong at key stage 3 and well above the national average at key stage 4.
- The school monitors the progress of pupils who attend the alternative provision. Leaders receive regular reports and take swift action to support any who are in danger of falling behind. As a result, these pupils make good progress in line with their starting points.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Students in the sixth form follow a good range of academic and vocational programmes and achieve well. The majority of students make good progress from their starting points and their progress improved in 2015. Information given by the school indicates that this improving picture is likely to continue.
- The sixth-form curriculum is well-balanced and meets students' needs well. Leaders have planned programmes of study that clearly meet the national requirements for this group of learners. Students follow individual study programmes, including foundation courses as well as A-level courses. The programmes of study meet the government's interim minimum standards for 16 to 19 education. Students also undertake appropriate work experience and follow additional opportunities such as debates, fundraising and subject-related visits that enrich their learning further.

- Students in the sixth form retake English and mathematics at GCSE if they have not already achieved a grade C in Year 11. Most students are successful in improving their previous grades.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. Leaders have high expectations of students, and teachers are accountable for monitoring students' progress through learning walks and external reviews. This is well managed by an experienced team of senior leaders. Any concerns that emerge over inconsistencies in the ways teachers check the progress of students are picked up very quickly by leaders.
- The number of students who stay on to complete their courses in the sixth form is increasing and leaders monitor those students who are at risk of leaving for whatever reason. A large number of students in the sixth form proceed to higher or further education, apprenticeships or employment, and this reflects the school's drive to raise the aspirations of all students.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form supports learning well and is highly regarded by students. Students say they are challenged to think deeply about issues and they appreciate the way leaders monitor their progress and give them additional support if it is needed.
- Students' personal development and welfare in the sixth form is very strong and is supported by a well-structured programme with a clearly identified rationale that meets their needs. As a result, students become confident, articulate and ambitious young adults.
- Opportunities for enrichment, careers education and guidance are available and students speak positively about the impact this has on their choices and how it prepares them for their next stages of learning.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good and attendance is improving. Students are dressed smartly and show confidence, maturity and independence. Students feel safe and well supported in school.

School details

Unique reference number	103550
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10002539

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
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	1,859
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Hull
Headteacher	Ingrid Abrahams
Telephone number	0121 366 6611
Website	www.greatbarrschool.org.uk
Email address	secretariat@greatbarr.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 January 2014

Information about this school

- The headteacher and some senior leaders have been in post since the start of this academic year.
- The school is much larger than the average-sized community secondary school and has a sixth form.
- Fewer than one half of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is extra funding given to schools to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or who are looked after by the local authority.
- A small number of pupils attend an alternative provision for their education at St George's Academy.
- The school's sixth form provides a range of academic and vocational courses, all of which are taught on site.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is currently preparing for the publication of a new school website. The information available meets the specified requirements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons in order to evaluate the quality of pupils' learning and the use of assessment. Many of these lessons were visited jointly with senior leaders.
- Pupils' work was sampled in lessons and through formal reviews of work in various subjects at key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's own information on the progress of current pupils, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to keeping pupils safe. Inspectors also looked at the minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Meetings were held with pupils across Years 7 to 11 and with students in the sixth form, as well as contact at breaktime and lunchtime. An inspector also met with members of the governing body.
- Discussions took place with senior leaders, subject leaders and staff responsible for the pastoral care and guidance of pupils. An inspector also had a discussion with a local headteacher who has been involved in supporting the school through the Birmingham Education Partnership.
- Inspectors listened to groups of pupils reading in Years 7 and 8 as part of their lessons and separately.
- Inspectors evaluated the small number of parental responses to Parent View and the free-text facility. Inspectors also evaluated the responses of larger groups of parents who completed the school's own formal evaluations at year group parents' meetings. They took account of the views of pupils through formal and informal conversations and the responses of staff who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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