

Barclay School

Walkern Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 3RB

Inspection dates

25–26 April 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Some middle leaders are still developing the skills and experience necessary to secure rapid improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- Pupils do not make the progress they should by the end of key stage 4. While current pupils' progress is improving, it remains variable across subjects, in particular in Year 11.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent across year groups and subjects.
- The school's assessment and feedback policy is not applied consistently. Pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work.
- Senior leaders' high expectations are not consistently reflected in the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work.
- Some teachers do not set work that challenges pupils, from different starting points, to achieve their best.
- The difference in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, when compared with those of other pupils nationally, although improving, is not reducing quickly enough.
- The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school more than once is reducing but is still too high.
- Curriculum changes to raise standards further are at an early stage of implementation.

The school has the following strengths

- Determined senior leadership is making a positive difference to the quality of education that the school provides.
- The standard of pupils' behaviour has improved. The school is a calm and orderly place to be.
- Sixth-form students make good progress on post-16 courses. Their attendance has improved markedly this year.
- Staff at all levels give high priority to pupils' safety and welfare. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has improved.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are sustained so that pupils of all abilities, including disadvantaged pupils, make the progress they should, by:
 - securing the consistent application of the school's marking and feedback policy
 - ensuring that leaders' high expectations are reflected in the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work
 - ensuring that teachers' planning results in work set at the right level for pupils of different abilities in the same group
 - eliminating the variability between subjects and year groups, so that current improvements are more consistently replicated across key stages.
- Enhance the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing middle leaders' skills further so that they are all equally confident in challenging their teams to raise standards
 - evaluating the impact of curriculum changes to ensure that new provision is making the required difference to pupils' outcomes across the school.
- Continue to reduce the incidence of fixed term-exclusion, in particular reducing the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or learning disabilities who are temporarily excluded from the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- After a period of uncertainty and considerable staffing changes, senior leaders and governors have established firm foundations for ongoing improvement. Although pupils are making better progress as a result of stronger teaching, there is more work to be done to secure consistently good teaching and improved outcomes across subjects and groups of pupils.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders remains inconsistent. A few inexperienced subject leads are still developing the skills they need to challenge their teams effectively to accelerate the pace of change. However, there is a deep resolve at all levels to raise standards further.
- Senior leaders, including governors, share the same determination and vision for improvement. Together, they have ensured that this vision is firmly rooted in teams across the school.
- The need for a stronger focus on curriculum planning has, appropriately, stepped up the ladder of improvement priorities over the last year. In taking action to inform the changes needed, leaders committed to a full curriculum review in October 2017.
- Although at an early stage of implementation, initial adaptations are under way to make changes to the curriculum model inherited by the leadership team when leaders took up their posts from January 2017.
- The initial plans aim to improve curriculum design to meet current pupils' needs more closely. For example, a work-related pathway has been introduced for Year 10 pupils.
- As a result of other changes made, including to Year 8 options, pupils are now able to follow programmes more suited to their different abilities. Appropriately, within the context of the changes already in place, pupils still have access to the full range of creative subjects.
- In the sixth form, a carefully considered level 2 route is in place for September 2018. This will allow students who do not achieve the grades they need for A-level subjects to follow suitably selected level 2 programmes, alongside opportunities to improve their GCSE grades in English and mathematics. These new courses are designed to lay the foundations for progression to further study, training and/or employment in the following year.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of what is now going well and what needs to be done to achieve improvement. Their work together reflects a steely determination on the journey towards becoming a good school.
- High expectations of the performance of staff and pupils are a non-negotiable feature of revised monitoring and review processes. The systems and procedures in place are widely understood. Middle leaders told inspectors that they feel 'trusted and empowered' by the senior team. As one of them said, 'The school is a great place to work now.'
- The introduction of a whole-school system for monitoring the quality of teaching,

learning and assessment means that subject teams are better placed to evaluate their own contribution to whole-school improvement. Subject-level evaluations are now more closely linked to the quality of pupils' work and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time. However, the depth of analysis of the improvement work in progress is still variable, typically dependent on the skills and experience of the subject leads.

- The revised monitoring and evaluation process includes an agreed format for reporting on the outcomes of teaching, learning and assessment reviews to governors. This enhances the depth of information available to the governor team, and so they are more effective when holding senior leaders to account for the school's performance.
- The outcomes from the reviews support the sharing of good practice and underpin the introduction of individual programmes of professional development for staff who need help to improve their teaching. Based on the range of information gathered, leaders are not afraid to take difficult decisions when teaching standards do not improve as quickly as they should.
- Leaders and subject teams make good use of the support available to them, through the local authority, specialist advisers and shared experiences with other schools. For example, working in partnership, school teams have enhanced teachers' specialist subject knowledge and have participated in moderation events to improve the accuracy of their assessments. Teachers commented favourably, in particular, on the good practice shared in evaluating together how well pupils are achieving against recently revised examination specifications.
- Parental perceptions of the school's performance have become increasingly more positive over the last year, as seen in their responses to the school's own surveys and to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- This turnaround is reflected in the growing number of pupils who will join the school in September 2018. Notably, for the first time since 2011, the number of pupils taking up places in Year 7 will exceed the number of Year 11 pupils leaving at the end of the current academic year.

Governance of the school

- Governors are ambitious for the school's performance. However, they know that previously they were not sufficiently well informed about the quality of provision and standards at the school.
- In recognition of this shortfall, they have overhauled their schedule of meetings to ensure that they are in a better position to scrutinise the impact of senior leaders' actions against key strategic priorities.
- To facilitate this model, designated working groups have been set up, led by a linked governor working together with an assigned senior leader who has responsibility for particular aspects of improvement work.
- The groups are linked to important issues, such as improving pupils' progress, diminishing the difference between outcomes of the school's disadvantaged pupils and those of other pupils nationally, raising the rates of pupils' attendance and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across subjects.

- Governors, collectively, have an appropriate range of skills and experience. The chair of governors provides effective leadership for the team and, together, they are committed to securing rapid improvement.
- Meeting records show that governors are now providing the headteacher and other senior leaders with a much greater level of challenge than they did previously.
- The governing body fulfils its duty to oversee the safeguarding of pupils effectively.
- An increased focus on analysis and the effective use of additional funding to support vulnerable groups is helping governors to ensure that money is well spent and that it is making a difference to pupils' progress over time.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A culture of safeguarding is well established across the school. Safeguarding systems and practices meet statutory requirements and are up to date.
- Staff are vigilant and clear about their responsibility to protect vulnerable pupils in their care. Records show that any concerns about pupils' welfare are logged promptly and followed up meticulously, including the commissioning of work with external agencies, when required.
- Through routine checks, governors play their part in ensuring that safeguarding sustains its high priority in the work of the school.
- All staff and governors are trained to the appropriate level, and training requirements are updated and reviewed regularly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Inspection evidence, pupils' work and the school's own records show that teaching has become increasingly more effective over the last year. However, these improvements are not fully established across all subjects and year groups.
- The school's marking and feedback policies are not implemented consistently, and so pupils are not routinely clear about what they need to do to improve. Senior leaders' high expectations are not always reflected in the quality, quantity and presentation of the work that pupils complete.
- Teachers do not regularly set work that is well matched to the different skills and abilities of pupils in the same group. In some lessons, inspectors observed pupils becoming bored because they were not challenged by activities, or they were repeating work that they had covered previously. For example, pupils in a Year 7 English class made insufficient progress when they were revisiting work from Year 6. This was because their prior learning was not extended effectively to reflect the requirements of a different key stage.

- Where teaching practice is more in line with senior leaders' expectations, teachers make best use of the information they have from regular assessments to plan learning to meet pupils' needs. In these lessons, teachers' feedback to pupils offers helpful guidance on what pupils need to do to improve their work.
- A home-learning working party has been established to review the relevance and quality of work that teachers set for pupils to complete outside the classroom. This group has been activated in response to some concerns raised by parents and carers and pupils in their feedback to the school's own survey questions.
- Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved. Information to support teachers' planning for learning for this group is now more widely shared with subject teams. This is supported with 'top tips' from the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), to help teachers to develop strategies aimed at bridging pupils' individual barriers to learning. A planned programme of professional development is now in place to raise teachers' awareness and understanding of specific learning needs.
- A recently introduced whole-school literacy policy aims to secure timely interventions for Year 7 pupils whose reading skills fall short of national expectations when they join the school. Further work is focused suitably on analysing the depth of pupils' writing across subjects and the identification of opportunities to share good practice.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The consistent focus on these aspects is a strong feature of all pupils' everyday experience at Barclay. Consequently, pupils understand what they need to do to keep safe at school and in their daily life.
- A wide range of pastoral support is in place, including counselling, help with concerns related to mental health and mentor support. Workshops are offered to parents to improve their understanding of how they can help too, for example, on coping with pupils' concerns relating to anxiety and keeping safe online.
- Pupils said that they feel safe in school. Most are confident that any incidences of bullying will be dealt with appropriately by school staff. An extensive consultation has brought greater clarity and consistency in the school's approach to addressing such concerns. School records track a significant reduction in reported incidents this year.
- Suitable use is made of tutorial and assembly time to raise awareness of important British values, such as tolerance and respect for each other, including for those with different points of view. Age-appropriate workshops for all year groups give consideration to wide-ranging issues, for example homelessness and the challenges associated with living independently as a young adult.
- Senior leaders give due regard to the personal development and welfare of pupils educated away from the school site. Typically, these pupils make better progress in developing important skills in the new setting than they were making previously in

school.

- Provision for pupils' careers education, advice and guidance has improved over the last year. As a result, they are better prepared to make informed choices when planning their next steps in education, employment and/or training.
- A new careers' hub has been set up in the school. Consequently, pupils have access to increasingly impartial guidance, for example through external agencies, alongside the internal advice available to them on the school site.
- A well-attended careers fair took place in the school hall during the inspection. The range of educational institutions and employers represented at the event, including those offering apprenticeship opportunities, was impressive.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are crystal clear about the implications of unacceptable conduct, as set out in the school's revised rewards and sanctions procedures. They told inspectors how much they appreciate the high priority given to celebrating positive behaviour and the difference that this is making to their day-to-day school experience.
- Inspectors' evidence was consistent with staff's and pupils' views that behaviour across the school has improved over the last year.
- The behaviour of the small number of pupils educated away from the school site is evaluated as part of routine monitoring of attendance and progress. While most of these pupils behave appropriately, suitable action is taken in cases where pupils' behaviour falls short of senior leaders' expectations.
- School records show that the number of positive behaviour reward points awarded to pupils across year groups has increased rapidly over the course of the current academic year, while, in turn, negative points are declining.
- Pupils are polite and generally respond well to visitors and other adults in the school. Working relationships between staff and pupils are usually positive and mutually respectful. Appropriate supervision at break and lunchtimes, supported by staff and sixth-form students, helps to ensure that the school is typically a calm and orderly place to be.
- The few instances of low-level disruption that inspectors observed during their visits to lessons were, in the main, linked to weaker teaching and activities that were not matched appropriately to pupils' abilities.
- A high priority is given to ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. The school's student-engagement officer works closely with staff, parents and pupils in continuing to secure an improving pattern of attendance and to reduce the persistent absence of a minority of pupils. There has been a marked improvement in sixth-form students' attendance this year.
- The recently established internal isolation unit has made a difference to the number of pupils who are temporarily excluded. Although reducing, senior leaders know that the overall figure is still too high.

- Leaders are working on strategies to reduce the proportion of fixed-term exclusions issued to disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is because these pupil groups are over-represented in the fixed-term exclusion information that the school holds.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Year 11 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, who left school in 2016 and 2017 made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally, overall and across a range of subjects.
- In both years, all groups, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, did not achieve as well as they should in English, mathematics and science. Outcomes were also variable across the wider curriculum, for example, in food technology and modern foreign languages.
- Since the formation of the new leadership team in spring 2017, leaders and governors have responded to previous disappointing results. They have taken actions focused on ensuring that pupils are better prepared for further education, employment and/or training when they leave the school.
- School records and other inspection evidence show that Year 11 pupils are making better progress this year, as a result of targeted interventions and improving teaching. The school's current assessment information suggests that, by the end of key stage 4, pupils' overall attainment, while still below national expectations, will be closer to the national figure this year. This represents an important improvement on recent years.
- Although the work in pupils' books and the school's current information also point to a noticeable improvement in progress for disadvantaged pupils in Years 7 to 11, lower attendance remains a barrier to more rapid improvement for these pupils.
- Inspectors' observations and the school's own evidence suggest that Year 11 pupils are making slower progress than key stage 3 pupils and pupils in Year 10, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN/and or disabilities. This is because of the legacy of significant underachievement for these groups of pupils over time.
- The school monitors the progress and attendance of the few pupils who are educated away from the school site. School records reflect typically suitable progress and, in some cases, better progress than these pupils were making previously in mainstream provision.
- Year 7 pupils who need to catch up with their reading and/or mathematics are showing signs of making faster progress because of focused interventions and teachers' improving understanding of the strategies that are making a difference.
- The progress of pupils following 16 to 19 study programmes has improved and more of them are achieving higher grades. Disadvantaged students make good progress across all A-level routes and, in particular, across applied general courses.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Effective leadership has supported an improving landscape of students' attainment and

progress in Years 12 and 13.

- Improvements in A-level outcomes overall in 2017 and as reflected in students' work in the current year are underpinned by a stronger focus on monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and ensuring that sixth-form students attend school more regularly.
- Greater clarity in raised expectations and the thorough monitoring and review processes now in place have made a significant difference to students' attendance rates this year. While still work in progress, current sixth-form attendance information represents a marked improvement on the previous year.
- Students' progress on applied general qualifications has been above the national average for the last three years. The small number of disadvantaged pupils make better progress on these courses than they do on A-level routes.
- Those students who need to retake GCSEs in English and/or mathematics typically make good progress, and most students improve their grades.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge and their effective approaches to the development of good working relationships with students are contributory factors in enhancing the quality of 16 to 19 provision. This is evident in sixth-form lessons, in students' conduct around the school and from conversations that students had with inspectors during the inspection.
- Regular moderation of assessments in school and with external partners is helping to secure teachers' confidence in the accuracy of their judgements about how well students are doing in mock examinations.
- Sixth-form students have access to a good range of level 3 courses. The range of provision is extended through the school's collaborative partnership with three other local schools. Students from these schools attend courses at Barclay, for example, in geography, film studies and government and politics.
- Regular 'learning for life' sessions develop students' citizenship and personal and social skills, so helping to prepare them for life beyond school. In addition, students' employability skills are enhanced through work experience, mock interviews and the leadership roles that they undertake as part of their engagement in wider-school life, for example, acting as mentors for younger pupils.
- The proportion of students, including those who are disadvantaged, who go on to further/higher education, employment and/or training is just above the national average.
- Careers guidance and support for students' next steps, including with university applications, and the provision of information about apprenticeships are increasingly effective in helping them to make the right choices when they leave the school.
- Students are positive about their sixth-form experience, and so retention rates are high. The staying-on rate at the end of key stage 4 is increasing. Well-considered curriculum changes for next year have played their part in the growing number of pupils aiming to progress to sixth-form studies in their own school.

School details

Unique reference number	117515
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10051786

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	607
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicky Clarke
Headteacher	Mark Allchorn
Telephone number	01438 232221
Website	www.barclay.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@barclay.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 July 2016

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils who receive support for SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The proportion of girls attending the school is below the national average.
- The school is part of a local sixth-form consortium. Some students study A-level subjects at other schools.
- A small number of pupils attend part-time vocational courses at North Hertfordshire Skills Centre. A few others are enrolled in alternative provision at North Hertfordshire Educational Support Centre and Stevenage Education Support Centre.
- The school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors took account of pupils' work in lessons and in books. They observed pupils' learning in 48 lessons, or parts of lessons. Some lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors heard Year 7 pupils reading, observed assembly and tutorial time and visited the library.
- Separate meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers, teaching assistants and three governors, including the chair of governors.
- Formal and informal discussions took place with pupils from all year groups and students in the sixth form. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, as they moved around the school and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation provided by the school. This included: the school's self-evaluation and development plan; assessment information for all year groups; information related to pupil premium spending and Year 7 catch-up funding; records of behaviour and attendance and those related to pupils' safety and welfare.
- Alongside the school's own survey of pupils', staff's and parents' views, inspectors considered the 92 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Liz Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Pryor	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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