

Robert Barclay Academy

Cock Lane, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire EN11 8JY

Inspection dates

18–19 June 2019

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| 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 | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have made significant progress in improving provision since the school opened. However, considerable staffing changes have hindered leaders' work to embed improvements and secure consistently good standards.
- Pupils' progress, including that of high prior attaining boys, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils, is too varied.
- Leaders do not record precisely their work with a small number of vulnerable pupils. Although they meet pupils' needs well on a day-to-day basis, this sloppiness in recording limits their ability to review their long-term impact on meeting the needs of these pupils.
- Although improving, teaching, learning and assessment are not addressing the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding precisely enough. This is especially but not exclusively the case in mathematics and science.
- Leaders and the local governing body lack rigour in how they measure and review the impact of the additional funding that they receive.
- Leaders do not analyse what the high rates of pupils' mobility tell them about how well they are meeting pupils' needs or where they need to take further action.
- The school is not yet meeting the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes well enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has worked tenaciously to bring stability to the school's day-to-day running. Consequently, the school is now a calm and purposeful environment.
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare have rapidly improved and are securely good.
- Newer leaders, including in the sixth form and in SEND, have made considerable improvements to provision over the last year.
- The headteacher and the trust have worked diligently to 'grow their own' teachers and leaders, and this is starting to secure greater permanence in staffing and leadership.
- The trust has a 'no-nonsense' attitude to school improvement. Trust resources and actions are positively supporting developments in the quality of curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment.
- Many parents and pupils are effusive in their praise for the improvements in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the additional funding that the school receives, including the Year 7 catch-up funding and the pupil premium, is bringing sustained and significant improvement to outcomes for pupils over time
 - continuing to support newer leaders, including middle leaders and those in the sixth form, SEND, mathematics and science, to raise standards in their respective areas
 - clarifying roles and responsibilities in the recording of information about vulnerable pupils and in checking the longer-term impact of this work
 - reviewing what the high rates of pupil mobility tell them about how well they are meeting the needs of these pupils to achieve better outcomes
 - enhancing how well the school meets the 16 to 19 study programme requirements, most notably in ensuring that learners access high-quality work-related learning and/or work experience that are meaningful to their aspirations and studies and in securing post-18 destinations.
- Raise standards in teaching, learning, assessment and outcomes by:
 - developing teachers' awareness and ability to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, especially those who are not in receipt of an education, health and care (EHC) plan
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those from higher-attaining starting points, most notably boys
 - developing the assessment processes so that teachers, including those who are newer to the school, have precise information about where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and skills that need to be addressed on an ongoing basis.

Inspectors recommend that an external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher, trust and local governing body have worked collectively to improve standards since the academy opened. Where they have achieved the quickest improvement is in addressing weaknesses in behaviour and attendance. This successful work is impacting positively on pupils' day-to-day experience in the classroom and around the school.
- Despite this journey of improvement, the continued challenges in staffing have hampered leaders' ability to embed improvements in teaching and reduce the variation in pupils' learning experiences fully. There remains too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders' recording of their work with the most vulnerable pupils is not consistently well managed. These records can lack detail and precision. Staff do establish very positive relationships with most pupils and their families and seek appropriate multi-agency support when significant events occur. However, this weaker record-keeping inhibits leaders' ability to review collectively the extent of their impact over time.
- Leaders often focus more on what has been done than on the impact it has had or on what it tells them about where they could be more effective. For example, leaders do not know enough about the impact of the Year 7 catch-up funding or pupil premium funding. They are not challenging themselves as to whether their use of this money is as effective as it could be.
- Leaders and governors do not know enough about the high levels of pupil mobility in the school. While large numbers of pupils join the school mid-way through the year, there is a decreasing yet significant core of pupils who leave the school mid-year, including those who opt for elective home education. While inspection evidence confirms that the school acts to discourage this, leaders are only just starting to review what this information tells them about where they can improve the provision.
- When teaching is not effective, senior leaders hold teachers to account and provide them with training and support. This means more teaching is now starting to meet the needs of pupils effectively. However, assessment processes are not helping teachers, including those newer to the school, to understand enough about where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils access a broad range of subjects across the school, including an extra-curricular programme of clubs, trips and visits. Leaders have invested time and resources in creating schemes of learning across subjects. Some staff also access subject-specific training to develop their own knowledge and expertise. This is particularly supporting non-specialist staff to plan lessons that contain appropriate curriculum coverage for pupils.
- Newer leaders this year, for example the head of sixth form, head of science and assistant headteacher for mathematics, have quickly identified and acted to address the issues that they need to tackle to raise standards in their respective areas. Staffing turbulence and their newness to role have thus far limited their opportunities to embed their work. As a result, their efforts are only just starting to bear fruit.

- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), since her arrival a year ago, has led well-thought-out and rapid improvements to provision for SEND. She has reviewed the needs of pupils with the most complex SEND, recruited and trained a specialist staff team to support this work and begun to identify pupils with possible unidentified and unmet SEND.
- However, the SENCO's work to improve the attainment and progress of pupils who have SEND but are not in receipt of an EHC plan has not yet begun. These pupils are not making consistently good progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders have changed the culture of personal development, behaviour and welfare in the school. Attendance and behaviour have improved markedly this year, because leaders have taken appropriate action. Pupils feel that the school is a respectful and calm environment that celebrates their successes and cares for them as individuals. Parents agree that this area of the school's work has improved considerably since the school opened.
- Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, or were in contact with inspectors directly commented very positively on the improvements in the school. Staff and pupils who spoke to inspectors were also highly appreciative of the support and changes brought by leaders and the trust. Leaders have worked effectively to improve the reputation of the school among parents in the local community.
- The trust, governors, staff, pupils and parents are appreciative of the stability and consistency established by the headteacher. His skill in spotting and developing staff talent to 'grow' in-house teachers and leaders and his creative management of staffing problems have ensured that the daily management of the school remains strong. He is dedicated to raising standards for pupils in the community and has tenaciously worked in challenging circumstances to ensure that the school continues to improve.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body has significant responsibility for holding leaders to account for standards in the school. In turn, the multi-academy trust checks on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the local governing body's work.
- The local governing body has acted to address weaknesses in its composition since opening. It has audited skills and recruited many new members with a range of expertise. Governors use this expertise to visit the school and check on the accuracy of the information provided to them by leaders. Governors use this knowledge to ask pertinent and insightful questions, especially to check that improvements are on track.
- Governors have an insightful understanding of the day-to-day running of the school and where there have been considerable improvements, especially in personal development, behaviour and welfare. They also have a broad understanding of the weaknesses in the school's provision and how these are being addressed, most notably in the school's SEND and sixth-form work.
- Where governors do not challenge leaders as rigorously is over the impact of the additional funding that the school receives, such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding. While governors check that the money is being spent directly on strategies and resources for pupils, they do not know whether this funding is doing

enough to secure better progress and outcomes for current pupils.

- The multi-academy trust provides meaningful and effective support to the school. Trust leaders are careful and considered in the wide-ranging support that they provide and commission. They provide hands-on support to school leaders, especially through the chief executive officer (CEO) and chief operating officer (COO).
- As a result, trust leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's work. Much of the trust's work is having a direct impact on classroom practice, for example in the development of the curriculum.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The checks on the suitability of staff to work in the school meet legal requirements. Staff training is up to date with the most recent guidance. Staff use this knowledge and understanding to make appropriate referrals when they have concerns about pupils.
- Leaders work with external agencies to protect pupils and to ensure the safeguarding of pupils is effective. Leaders also work diligently with other adults in the school, such as the school counsellor, to ensure that pupils are monitored well. However, on occasion, the school's records lack detail, especially about the rationale behind leaders' decisions regarding the actions that they take and the ongoing checks made on pupils in the longer term.
- Leaders have created a culture where pupils feel free to express worries or concerns. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, both online and in the wider world. Pupils access lessons and assemblies that help them to understand a range of dangers and how to protect themselves. Pupils say that they feel safe and are confident to speak to adults in the school if they are worried or have a problem.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the school opened, regular staffing changes have meant that teachers have not been able to support pupils well enough for them to make consistently strong progress in their learning, over time, so that they make good progress by the end of key stage 4.
- Some newer teachers to the school have not yet secured sufficient knowledge of what pupils already know and can do. This means that teachers are still trying to identify the gaps in pupils' previous learning and address them.
- Assessment is not supporting staff consistently well to know how to address the gaps in pupils' learning in some subject areas. For example, despite extensive coverage of individual topics in mathematics, some pupils are performing poorly in the department's chosen method of assessment. This approach to assessment makes it very difficult for pupils and staff to identify sharply and quickly what areas of weakness in the learning need addressing.
- Pupils' needs when they have SEND, but not an EHC plan, are not consistently well met by teachers. Leaders have identified that, while they have focused on pupils with the

most complex needs, they have not yet started addressing the needs of this group fully. Leaders have also identified that there are gaps in staff expertise and understanding about how to better identify and meet pupils' emerging needs.

- Strategies are having a more positive effect on the development of pupils who have an EHC plan. These pupils are particularly well supported in their personal and academic development by the new team of learning support assistants, who have been trained in an array of specialist areas, such as attachment disorders. More of these pupils are engaging positively with their learning and starting to make better progress.
- Leaders and staff have raised the profile of reading through daily reading sessions and the lesson time allocated to a commercial reading programme in key stage 3. This year, leaders have also invested in more adults to hear pupils read so that pupils' misconceptions can be picked up more readily at the time they occur. However, unforeseen staffing issues this year have reduced the school's ability to capitalise on this emerging strength in its work and to share practice between staff. Key stage 3 pupils from lower starting points are making sustained but not significant improvements in their reading ability.
- There is an increasing proportion of teaching, learning and assessment which is meeting pupils' needs more effectively. As a result, more pupils are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to increasingly complex problems. Pupils respond well to these opportunities and make good use of their time to learn.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe and are confident in the staff that look after them. Adults promote caring, secure relationships with pupils, including the large number of pupils who join the school mid-way through the year.
- Pupils say that bullying is not a problem, as people appreciate and value the things that make them different. Pupils say that staff deal with any problems quickly and effectively. Leaders work hard on developing a community ethos in the school.
- An array of services help pupils when they are facing additional problems or a crisis or have concerns. School nursing teams, the school counsellor and the school's new well-being coordinator ensure that pupils get timely and well-coordinated support and guidance.
- Pupils thrive on responsibility. Leaders provide varied opportunities for pupils to feed back on their experiences of learning and the school. The school's junior leadership team, buddying schemes between older and younger pupils and the new 'well-being warriors' are increasing the opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for aspects of the school's work. Pupils feel their voice is heard and that their views make a real difference to what happens in school.
- There are very few pupils who access alternative provision through the Rivers Education Support Centre locally. The rationale behind the use of alternative provision is well thought out and relevant to the pupils who access it. On occasion, leaders'

records lack detail about the ongoing checks that are made on these pupils, their attendance and their behaviour.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Where adults' expectations are high, pupils flourish and enjoy learning. It is only when pupils are not quite sure what they should be learning or wait too long for extra help that a few become distracted.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school site, including during breaktimes. These times are well organised and properly supervised by adults. Pupils respond appropriately to any requests by staff and interact well with one another.
- The small number of pupils who need the most guidance to manage their behaviour are supported well. Adults' calm, nurturing manner helps pupils to understand and uphold the behaviour expectations. Consequently, poor behaviour is rare, and incidents requiring fixed-term exclusion or use of the school's isolation system are rapidly reducing.
- Pupils now value their education and attend regularly. Attendance has improved and persistent absence has reduced considerably since the school opened. Consequently, this year attendance is high and rates of persistent non-attendance are low. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. This is a real strength in leaders' work to address areas of previous weakness.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Year 11 pupils did not make the progress they should have in 2018. Ongoing weaknesses in mathematics and new concerns in science in 2018 meant that pupils in these two subjects made weaker progress than in other areas, such as English.
- Most notably, disadvantaged pupils' progress was weaker for the second year in a row, especially in science and in the wider curriculum subjects that constitute the 'open' element of their studies.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved a good pass in English and mathematics combined increased from the previous year. However, pupils' attainment remained below the national average. The average point score that pupils achieved across eight subjects also reduced.
- Leaders are using ongoing and changing information about gaps in current pupils' knowledge and understanding to provide intensive intervention in Year 11. This work is reducing some of the underperformance of current pupils. However, current school information shows that, while there are improvements in the progress that pupils are making, they are still underperforming from their varied starting points.
- There are inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment. These are exacerbated by staffing challenges and limitations in some subjects' current assessment practices. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in younger year groups are not being closed quickly enough to secure good progress and attainment. School leaders have

identified that pupils with SEND, boys with higher-attaining starting points and disadvantaged pupils are not making good progress, over time, from their varied starting points.

- Despite these inconsistencies in outcomes, leaders have invested in good-quality, impartial careers guidance, which is supporting pupils to make suitable decisions about the next steps in their education, training or employment. As a result, almost all are going onto appropriate destinations at post-16, an increasing proportion of whom this year intend to return to the school's own sixth form.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- In 2018, the achievement of students in Year 13 was low. Standards were poor. This was a significant dip from the school's better performance in 2017. Newer leaders this year have acted quickly and appropriately to address these deficiencies. Academic and wider standards are now improving. However, there is still work to do to ensure that the 16 to 19 study programmes are met to a good standard.
- While leaders' actions have brought improvements this year in the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form, there are still inconsistencies in teachers' use of assessment. Leaders have identified where a few subjects are still underperforming, and are acting to address these issues.
- Newer leaders have acted quickly to address the weaker aspects of the sixth-form provision. This year, all Year 12 students are accessing work experience. Guidance for students who are preparing to go on to post-18 destinations has improved. There is also now a programme of wider learning to meet students' personal, social and development needs, called the 'core skills programme'.
- Work experience, although now in place, is not always meaningful to students' current programmes of study and/or their aspirations. While more students have secured appropriate post-18 destinations this year than in the previous two years, there are still too many leaving without a secure destination at the end of Year 13. Moreover, leaders are still embedding their core skills programme to fully develop the wider aspects of students' development and welfare.
- Most students are happy, responsible and feel well supported and safe. Students engage in a range of community, charity and school roles. The welfare provision within the sixth form ensures that any concerns about students are being followed up well. However, on occasion, the recording of this support is not well documented. This does not support newer staff to have a coherent overview about what is in place for students over time.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 143131 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10088644 |

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

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| Type of school | Other secondary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| 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 | 622 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 60 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Martin Sidders |
| Chair of local governing body | Dawn Warwick |
| Headteacher | Ced de la Croix |
| Telephone number | 0199 241 0800 |
| Website | www.robertbarclayacademy.co.uk |
| Email address | head@robertbarclayacademy.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Robert Barclay Academy is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary academy. When its predecessor school was inspected by Ofsted in 2014, it was judged to be inadequate.
- The school became a sponsor-led academy in September 2016. The school is sponsored by the Scholars' Education Trust (formerly the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust). Prior to this, Sir John Lawes staff and leaders provided school-to-school support to the predecessor school.
- Responsibility for the school's performance lies with the trust board. There are

currently four other schools in the trust.

- The trust devolves significant responsibility for holding leaders to account to a local governing body. In turn, the trust holds the local governing body to account for its work.
- The current headteacher took up post shortly before the inspection of the predecessor school in 2014. He remained in this position when the school became an academy in 2016.
- In January 2017, a No Formal Designation (NFD) section 8 inspection was undertaken. This found safeguarding to be effective.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND but who do not have an EHC plan is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an EHC plan is below the national average.
- The school uses one off-site provider for a small number of pupils as part of their curriculum provision: Rivers Education Support Centre, in Hoddesdon.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning and scrutinised work in both the core and foundation subjects in key stages 3 and 4. A number of these observations were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the CEO and COO for the Scholars' Education Trust, the headteacher and senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also met with representatives of the local governing body, including the chair.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, safeguarding records, pupils' progress information and school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors analysed 92 responses from Ofsted's online survey of parents, Parent View, including the free text commentary provided by some parents. Inspectors also used evidence from emails and telephone calls from parents.
- Staff did not receive the link to Ofsted's online survey of staff. Inspectors spoke to staff informally throughout the inspection, and formally in a meeting on Day 2.
- Pupils did not receive the link to Ofsted's online survey of pupils. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils at break and lunch and in lessons. Inspectors also met formally with pupils to discuss their experiences. Inspectors also heard pupils in Year 7 read.
- There were no sixth-form pupils accessing lessons on site at the time of the inspection. Inspectors met with leaders, reviewed documentation and visited some Year 12 learners at their work experience, including a group who were undertaking work experience on the school site. A small sample of work was seen by inspectors on Day 1, provided by the pupils who spoke to the visiting inspector.
- The lead inspector also held telephone calls with representatives from the local authority and National Health Service team.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Kim Pigram, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Gerard Batty | Ofsted Inspector |
| David Hutton | Ofsted Inspector |
| Bruce Goddard | 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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