

Inspection of a good school: The Basildon Lower Academy

Timberlog Close, Timberlog Lane, Basildon, Essex SS14 1UX

Inspection dates:

23–24 October 2019

Outcome

The Basildon Lower Academy continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Teachers and leaders want pupils to do well in all respects. Leaders want pupils to experience things at school that they might not do otherwise. Most pupils enjoy the school's enrichment periods where they can try different activities and develop new interests.

Pupils like that they learn a broad range of subjects. They particularly enjoy creative or practical subjects. In the past, the curriculum, and how it has been taught, did not prepare pupils well enough for key stage 4. Leaders have now planned more carefully what pupils should learn in each subject. They have also improved the quality of teaching, but this remains too variable.

Pupils told us that bullying is not common. They respect and value difference. Pupils say that the school's 'Respect Champion' sorts out any bullying quickly and well.

Most pupils are well behaved and want to learn. They are frustrated that some pupils' behaviour disrupts lessons. School leaders have not addressed this fully, even though inspectors identified that this was an area for improvement last time the school was inspected.

Leaders encourage and support good attendance. However, a small minority of pupils are absent too often, meaning they miss out on learning.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders offer pupils a broad curriculum. Pupils choose from a wide range of subjects to study for worthwhile qualifications. Good-quality careers information alerts pupils to opportunities available to them. Pupils begin to study for these qualifications while at Basildon Lower Academy. They continue these qualifications at the Basildon Upper

Academy in Year 10. Currently, few pupils choose subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Music is not taught to all pupils in the school. Leaders have credible plans to address both issues.

Leaders' subject planning makes sure that pupils learn things in a sensible order. However, some teachers are not implementing the curriculum well enough.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers use questioning skilfully to check and deepen pupils' understanding. Teachers break down learning into smaller chunks and choose activities well, helping pupils remember important knowledge and skills. This is not as commonplace as it needs to be. Too many teachers are slow to spot pupils' mistakes or misunderstandings. Some activities do not help pupils to learn what teachers intend them to. These weaknesses slow pupils' progress and do not help improve the quality of pupils' work.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) follow the full curriculum offered. Leaders accurately identify these pupils' barriers to learning. Adults check the impact of the support that pupils with SEND receive. Nonetheless, because teaching is too variable, pupils with SEND make patchy progress. Absence or poor behaviour hinder the learning of some pupils with SEND.

The school's personal, social, health and relationships education (PSHRE) programme is carefully constructed. Pupils learn how to look after their physical and emotional health. They can get a variety of support through the school, for example through a young carers group, peer-led support and 'respect days'. Assemblies and trips make pupils aware of opportunities outside of their local community. Pupils can take on responsibilities. Pupils who are diversity ambassadors, sports captains or on the school executive are proud of these roles. They represent and support other pupils well.

Leaders and trustees know what needs to improve. They are raising expectations of teachers and subject leaders. At the same time, leaders have shown consideration for staff well-being. Leaders are 'growing their own teachers' by training staff to become teachers. Staff, including those new to teaching, feel valued. They like being able to plan learning and share ideas with colleagues to develop the curriculum. Non-specialist mathematics and science teachers get support to improve their subject knowledge.

Leaders have worked hard to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour. Some pupils are still not meeting leaders' raised expectations consistently. Teachers' use of the behaviour system is inconsistent, meaning that learning time is lost. Leaders have lots of information about behaviour and attendance. They could make better use of this. Leaders miss chances to check and refine their actions to improve things further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn to keep safe through PSHRE lessons and a programme of assemblies. Work about drug misuse is linked to understanding the risks of gangs and county lines. Visits from the police and fire service highlight specific risks at certain times of the year.

Staff get the training needed to identify that pupils may be at risk of harm. They are confident to report their concerns. Leaders act on these quickly, involving outside agencies when necessary, so that pupils get any help that they need.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and fit for purpose.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers are inconsistent in how well they support pupils' learning. Some teaching is not routinely adapted to address pupils' emerging misconceptions. Some teachers do not think carefully enough about how activities support the intended learning. When this is the case, pupils are unclear about what they are learning and do not remember or use important subject knowledge and skills. Leaders should ensure that their intended curriculum in each subject is implemented effectively by teachers.
- Leaders should continue to review and develop the curriculum, to ensure that it fulfils their aim to provide a wide range of learning and cultural experiences for pupils, especially in music.
- Some staff are not applying the school's behaviour protocols consistently, so these are not having the impact that they should on managing behaviour and eliminating low-level disruption in lessons. Leaders should ensure that all teachers use the school's behaviour and reward systems consistently to tackle low-level disruption and promote positive attitudes.
- Leaders should use all available information to improve the attendance and behaviour of some pupils. While there have been improvements in attendance overall, there remains a small core of pupils who are persistently absent. Similarly, there remains a small group of pupils for whom the school's actions are not consistently bringing about improvements in behaviour and attitudes. Leaders should use all of the information that they have to identify how they can adjust what is in place for these pupils to have a positive impact on their behaviour and attendance.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged The Basildon Lower Academy to be good on 19–20 November 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	135895
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10078263
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	775
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Leslie Livermore
Headteacher	Gary Smith
Website	www.basildonacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 November 2015

Information about this school

- There have been significant changes in leadership and staffing since the previous inspection of the school. The headteacher took up the post as headteacher of Basildon Lower Academy in September 2017. He is also headteacher of the Basildon Upper Academy. Together, the two schools form the Basildon Academies Trust (the trust). A separate inspection of Basildon Upper Academy took place at the same time as this inspection.
- The two schools share a single senior leadership team. The board of trustees oversees the work of both schools and acts as a single governing body for the two schools. Pupils begin their key stage 4 examination courses in Year 9. They complete them at the Upper Academy.
- The number of pupils on roll at the school has increased since the previous inspection. However, the school remains smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at the school is approximately twice the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND, including those with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), is broadly average. The school has a higher proportion of boys than in a typical secondary school.
- If the school needs to make use of external alternative provision, pupils are referred to

Children's Support Service (CSS), which is managed by the local authority. The school makes use of internal provision and programmes to support some pupils to improve their behaviour. This includes the 'Return to Learn Centre' and secondary readiness programme.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders, including the deputy headteacher who acts as the special needs coordinator (SENCo), the leaders who have cross-site responsibility for English and mathematics at both Basildon Lower Academy and Basildon Upper Academy, and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and history. In each subject, inspectors visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' work (in English this included listening to pupils read) and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed school policies, procedures and records. The lead inspector met with the designated leader for safeguarding and the deputy safeguarding leader to discuss their work and review examples of the actions taken to keep pupils safe. Inspectors also checked staff members' understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- To gather pupils' views on the school, inspectors spoke to groups of pupils as part of the deep dives and when visiting lessons. The lead inspector also met with a group of pupils selected by the school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors reviewed the 38 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the lead inspector met with a group of newly qualified and trainee teachers.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation and information, including information about pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took into consideration the four free-text comments submitted to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered response to parent surveys carried out by the school.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Cathy Tooze

Ofsted Inspector

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