

Inspection of Great Barr Academy

Aldridge Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, West Midlands B44 8NU

Inspection dates: 26–27 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have not made the progress they should at Great Barr Academy. Until recently, leaders struggled to improve the quality of education and pupils' attitudes. In September, the trust that runs the school put new leaders in charge, and this has already made a big difference. Most learning is well organised, although pupils say that they occasionally find work hard to follow. Senior leaders have set clear expectations. Pupils study a good range of subjects, but learning is more consistent in some subjects than in others.

All pupils are made welcome in this school. Most, but not all, take a pride in their uniform and in their schoolwork. Some are motivated by the link between their work and their future careers. In other cases, the curriculum is not tailored to their needs so they lose concentration in class. Attendance remains too low.

Most of the time, pupils behave well. There are a few incidents of poor behaviour at social times, when a small number of pupils mess about and create a disturbance. When bullying occurs, staff generally sort it out effectively. Pupils feel safe.

There is a very good atmosphere in the sixth form.

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

The school offers a good range of subjects, but the quality varies from one subject to another. Leaders know this and have worked to improve curriculum planning, so that new learning builds on what pupils can already do. However, this is being achieved in some subjects, such as English, more consistently than in others. In science and mathematics, teachers sometimes find it hard to introduce new ideas and fill the gaps in what pupils should already know. This holds pupils back in these subjects.

In modern foreign languages, the take-up at key stage 4 has been low. In order to improve this, leaders are strengthening the curriculum offer. They aim to make it more appealing to pupils and increase the take-up.

Sometimes, the help for pupils to learn from their mistakes is not as effective as it might be. However, all teachers know their subjects well and are beginning to make useful links between different areas of the curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes towards school require improvement. Most remember to be polite and act responsibly, but a small number do not. After social times, pupils often drift back to classrooms in a leisurely way. Some pupils do not present their work neatly. However, pupils say that behaviour is improving and that poor conduct rarely disturbs their learning.

Leaders use exclusions in the right way, but the rate of exclusion remains above the

national average. The frequent transfer of pupils into and out of the school affects pupils' attendance but, even so, absence remains too high.

This is a school that is fair to all. Pupils respect everyone from the local community's many different cultures and traditions. Leaders have put together a well-organised programme that develops pupils' social and cultural understanding. It is not yet taught consistently, so that many pupils' knowledge of some topics is hazy. The school provides pupils with a range of extra-curricular activities, but many do not make the most of the opportunities provided.

The school is part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). The trust appointed new leaders in September, and this has already brought major benefits. The trust has a precise understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Its leaders know that there is considerable work still to do. Staff say that they feel energised and encouraged by recent changes, and that leaders have taken their ideas into account. Leaders have set up clear procedures to check on the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching. Leaders are improving rapidly the quality of education for all. As part of this, they are improving what the school does for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language.

Leaders have re-ordered the school day, and this has improved behaviour. Staff are working more effectively with parents and carers, although some remain reluctant to work with the school.

The sixth form is very well organised. Students can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. The curriculum and teaching are strong, and teachers encourage students to research and learn for themselves. Leaders check well on students' progress and support them if they are falling behind. Students benefit from an impressive programme of additional activities, including work experience. Careers guidance is good. Students complete their courses and a high proportion go on to university.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders are very knowledgeable about the varied risks that pupils face. They have strong links with other organisations that protect children, and use them well. Staff are persistent when pupils do not receive the support they need. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained to spot any pupils who may be at risk of harm. They make the appropriate checks when staff are appointed. The school keeps detailed records securely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Subject leaders have not finished planning the curriculum. The task is complex, because of the significant gaps that many pupils have in their learning, and because of the relatively large numbers of pupils who join the school during a key stage. Subject leaders should ensure that work builds consistently on what pupils already know and understand. They should also embed the means of identifying reliably what pupils have learned, and help pupils to consolidate where they cannot remember or apply their learning.
- Some teaching is not implementing the curriculum as well as it should. In some instances, day-to-day planning does not reflect leaders' intentions. Sometimes, teachers' explanations are not entirely clear, and activities do not develop pupils' understanding as fully as they might. Basic standards in the presentation of pupils' work are not secure. Leaders need to identify where teaching is less effective, and provide the required training and support.
- In this large school, subject leadership is a demanding role. Senior leaders should ensure that all directors of learning have a secure understanding of how to design the curriculum, and how to check on its implementation. Where additional staff have subject responsibilities, leaders should allocate these with a view to addressing quickly and effectively those areas that require attention.
- There is room for pupils to take a greater interest in their learning, and a greater responsibility for their own progress. Staff should help them to see how their everyday work fits into the bigger picture. They should foster those habits and routines that will best support pupils in building up a coherent body of knowledge and skills.
- Most of the pupils who spoke to us mentioned the rowdy behaviour at social times of a small number of pupils. The frequency of such incidents is declining, but staff should ensure that it reduces to the point where it no longer affects pupils' school experience. Staff should work with those whose behaviour is anti-social to make sure that they understand how their actions affect other people.
- Since the school opened as an academy, attendance has been well below the national average. There are signs that leaders' current strategies are working, but there is a long way to go. Leaders should persist in establishing the value of attending school with those families who are yet to be convinced.

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're 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	143435
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10111653
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1710
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jon Rouse
Headteacher	Andrew Williams
Website	http://greatbarracademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Great Barr Academy converted to become an academy in December 2016. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2016, it was judged to require improvement overall. The school is part of the Shaw Education Trust, a MAT. In June 2019, the trust established an interim executive board (IEB) to exercise direct control over the school.
- The acting headteacher and the executive headteacher took up their posts in September 2019.
- A small number of pupils access alternative provision at Oscar Academy, St George's Academy, East Birmingham Network Academy 2, South Birmingham College and TLG North Birmingham.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher and other senior leaders. Meetings were held with curriculum leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. We also met with a range of other staff, including newly qualified teachers. The lead inspector met with representatives of the trust, including the chair of the IEB.
- When inspecting safeguarding, we looked at the school's procedures for recruiting and checking on staff. We also considered the effectiveness of staff training and the procedures to keep pupils safe.
- We reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' plans to improve the school, records of IEB meetings, and the school's attendance and behaviour records.
- We focused on English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and geography during the inspection. We considered the school's curriculum plans, visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. We also met with pupils and with teachers to discuss learning in these subjects.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Rob Steed	Ofsted Inspector
Natasha Rancins	Ofsted Inspector
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