

Inspection of a good school: Bridgwater College Academy

Parkway, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4QY

Inspection dates:

4–5 February 2020

Outcome

Bridgwater College 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?

The school has suffered some turbulence in its leadership since the last inspection. During that period, pupils' learning suffered.

Pupils are now learning more than they used to. This is seen most clearly in the secondary phase. Improvements are slower to take hold in the primary phase. Pupils do not gain the depth of knowledge they should.

Most pupils feel happy and safe in school. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and positive. Pupils know that they are cared for well. They say that teachers will go the extra mile for them.

Pupils' behaviour has improved because of the higher expectations that the headteacher has put in place. This is both pleasing for pupils who do not want to be disrupted and want to get on with their learning and unpopular with those who misbehave.

Most pupils feel that bullying is dealt with well. There are clear systems in place. The school has a team of older pupils who are trained to help support younger pupils when minor disputes occur. Pupils report that staff take incidents seriously. Nonetheless, some parents feel that teachers do not respond to concerns they raise about behaviour and bullying rapidly enough.

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

The new headteacher has set about improving the school with determination and energy. She is leading her team of teachers in a drive to raise expectations with success. Leaders have put an ambitious curriculum in place for all pupils. Every teacher understands the need to push pupils to learn more than they used to. Middle leaders have organised the work for pupils in a way that is logical and helps pupils to learn. This new curriculum is

having the most impact in the secondary sector. Leaders provide effective training and support for teachers. This ensures that they know how to teach their subjects effectively. Teachers are good at checking that pupils understand, and then providing extra help if necessary. In mathematics, for example, teachers regularly check what pupils can do. They then revisit topics that are causing problems. Pupils like this approach because it helps them to build their knowledge on sound foundations.

In the primary phase, the new curriculum is also in place. This is having an increasing impact. For example, teachers ask pupils to concentrate on their writing. As a result, Year 6 pupils can spell and punctuate their work well. However, sometimes teachers have lower expectations. This prevents pupils from learning all the essential knowledge they need to do as well as they should.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are usually supported well. In the primary phase, pupils' needs are identified and teachers and teaching assistants work together to help pupils keep up with their classmates. In the secondary phase, plans are in place for each pupil. However, teachers are not getting the training they need to help them support these pupils.

The headteacher has put reading at the heart of the new curriculum. In key stage 1, pupils are taught to decode words well. Pupils' reading books are matched to the sounds they know. Pupils throughout the school are expected to read daily. This is helping to make sure that pupils get the start in reading they need.

The early years curriculum is not enabling children to gain the knowledge they should. Teachers make sure there is a broad range of activities to improve children's skills. However, they do not consistently ask enough of children. Activities are not well sequenced or structured. Teachers do not consistently assess children's progress accurately enough. This means too few children are ready for key stage 1.

Leaders have revised the primary curriculum to make sure that pupils learn a wide range of subjects. For instance, they are currently enjoying a stimulating history topic. However, the curriculum in key stage 3 is too narrow for some pupils. This inhibits pupils' opportunities to study arts subjects, history and geography well enough. The proportion studying the English Baccalaureate suite of GCSE subjects is very low. Leaders have ambitious plans in place to improve the secondary curriculum. For example, they plan for every pupil to take a GCSE in a foreign language. However, the timing of these changes is dependent on ensuring that skilled staff are available.

Pupils usually have positive attitudes in lessons and want to succeed. Pupils say that this is because the headteacher is insisting on better behaviour. Behaviour around the school site is generally positive. However, a minority of pupils act poorly if left unsupervised. Teachers handle these pupils well.

Trust leaders and governors work together well to challenge the school to improve. Leaders balance the need to improve the school with an understanding of teachers' workload. Teachers appreciate this and are energised by leaders' passion to make the school as good as it can be.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture across all parts of the school. Leaders make sure that staff are well trained to spot pupils who may be vulnerable. Information is shared appropriately, and records are robust.

There is a well-trained team of staff who support pupils facing additional challenges in their lives. They work closely with parents, social care staff and the police to keep pupils safe.

School leaders are well supported by the multi-academy trust, whose staff undertake regular checks to make sure standards of care are maintained.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Currently, the curriculum in key stage 3 is too narrow. Too many pupils do not study the arts and both history and geography well enough. Leaders should put a revised curriculum in place as soon as possible.
- Children do not get off to a strong enough start in the early years. Teachers do not consistently have the highest expectations of children and do not check what children know and can do well enough. Leaders should insist on a curriculum that makes sure children are prepared well for key stage 1.
- Parents feel that school leaders do not respond to their concerns in a timely and appropriate way. Leaders should ensure that parents feel a full partner in their children's education.

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/outstanding. 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 school to be good on 28–29 June 2016.

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 the school and 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

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| Unique reference number | 138375 |
| Local authority | Somerset |
| Inspection number | 10122379 |
| Type of school | All-through |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,393 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of governing body | Carole Chevalley |
| Headteacher | Zoe Stucki |
| Website | http://www.bridgwatercollegeacademy.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 28–29 June 2016 |

Information about this school

- The school is sponsored by Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust.
- The school has a higher than average number of pupils supported by pupil premium funding and a higher than average number of pupils with SEND.
- Since the school was last inspected it has had two changes of headteacher and several other changes of senior leaders.
- The school hosts a unit for 14 secondary-aged pupils on the autistic spectrum.
- The school uses three alternative providers, The Net Project, Bridge School and Bridgwater and Taunton College, to meet the needs of a total of seven pupils.

Information about this inspection

- We visited lessons with school leaders. We looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils in groups and informally.
- We considered the school's own documentary evidence and spoke with school and trust leaders about it.
- We spoke with teachers about their work.

- We considered the information gained from surveys of parents, staff and pupils. We also considered a letter from a parent.
- We completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics and history. This included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, meeting with senior and subject leaders, and discussions with teachers and pupils.

Inspection team

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