

Inspection of Barr Beacon School

Old Hall Lane, Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands WS9 0RF

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected eight years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Barr Beacon is a friendly and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy attending, achieve very well and feel safe being themselves. Leaders have created a culture where pupils are 'proud to succeed'. Pupils take their learning seriously. They behave impeccably in lessons, try hard, and do not give up when they find work difficult.

Pupils build trusting relationships with staff. This helps everyone feel safe. Throughout the school day, staff take every opportunity to interact with pupils. These interactions are warm and friendly. If bullying happens, pupils know that they can rely on their teachers to sort it out quickly. Students in the sixth form greatly appreciate the support from teachers who they say routinely 'go above and beyond' to help them with their work.

There is a broad range of extra-curricular activities. These are of the highest quality. They include a Japanese club, music groups, sports activities, cadets, and many, many more. There is something for everyone. Nearly all pupils participate. This is because leaders do not leave anything to chance. They ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) take part and benefit from the school's impressive offer.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including those with SEND. They ensure that all pupils in Years 7 to 9 learn a broad range of subjects. In addition, they have taken effective action to ensure that the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is at the heart of the curriculum. In the sixth form, the wide range of courses available closely matches students' aspirations and interests.

Curriculum leaders have carefully designed their subjects to ensure that they build in a logical order. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They are passionate about the subjects they teach and explain content clearly. All of this helps pupils to achieve well.

Teachers make regular checks in lessons to spot pupils who may need help. Teachers in the sixth form use the information from these checks well, for example, by re-teaching content that pupils have found difficult. However, not all teachers do this well enough. This means that sometimes teachers move on to new learning before pupils are ready to do so.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on promoting a love of reading. They have ensured that all teachers know how to teach reading well. Adults read stories to pupils during form time and use this time to introduce new vocabulary skilfully. Pupils enjoy this. Furthermore, leaders have deliberately chosen age-appropriate books that broaden pupils' knowledge of social, equality and cultural issues.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils. Their expectations are well understood by the whole community and pupils consistently live up to them. This helps to create an environment that is calm, purposeful and orderly. Lessons are free from disruption. Leaders go out of their way to keep a close eye on pupils. On the rare occasion that pupils fall short of their expectations, leaders take the time to find out why. This means that pupils get the help they need to be successful, and issues are nipped in the bud.

Pupils are extremely well-motivated, polite and courteous. Pupils look out for each other. They take pride in Barr Beacon being a 'telling school'. They know if someone is being treated unkindly, the right thing to do is to let an adult know.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is of the highest quality. Staff know pupils very well. The school ensures that all pupils benefit from the range of opportunities. For example, staff identify and remove barriers that might prevent some pupils with SEND from enjoying the same experiences as their peers. Furthermore, pupils receive high-quality careers advice. Older pupils, including those in the sixth form, praised the support they receive in writing applications to universities and colleges. All of this means that pupils are very well prepared for the next stages of their education, employment or training.

Staff and leaders work together well. Leaders take account of the main pressures on staff when designing new policies and approaches. Staff greatly appreciate this. Morale is high and staff are proud to work at the school. Trustees are highly effective. They are supportive of leaders and hold them to account very well. They routinely gather the views of staff, parents and pupils. This means they have a thorough understanding of the school. They ensure that decisions they make about the curriculum are always in the best interests of pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of vigilance. Leaders ensure that all staff are alert to the signs a pupil may need support. Staff pass on any concerns quickly.

Leaders keep detailed records of any concerns. They use these records well to identify whole-school trends. When patterns emerge, they take effective action to support pupils. For example, following the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, leaders spotted an increase in pupils with anxiety. Leaders took swift action to ensure these pupils had access to the support they needed. Furthermore, they changed the curriculum so that pupils had further opportunities to learn about how to keep mentally healthy.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers routinely check pupils' learning in lessons. However, not all teachers use the information from these checks to adapt their teaching. This means sometimes pupils are moved on to new learning before they are ready to do so. Leaders should ensure that all teachers are expert in responding to the information they have elicited from the checks they make in lessons and adapting their teaching accordingly.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	136885
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10253988
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
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	1575
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	233
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jeremy Bench
Headteacher	Kate Hibbs
Website	www.barrbeaconschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 and 10 January 2014

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Matrix Academy Trust.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders. They also met with the chief executive officer and members of the school improvement team for the Matrix Academy Trust. They met with representatives of governance including the chair of the trust board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in French, science, mathematics, history and music. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning.
- Through discussions with leaders, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. They also looked at documents related to safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of different classes and at different times of the day. They talked to pupils informally about bullying, behaviour and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also looked at responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Christopher Stevens, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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