



Barclay School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117515
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280103
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Michael Smith LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Walkern Road
School category	Community		SG1 3RB
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 232221
Number on roll	1102	Fax number	01438 232300
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Andrew Boakes
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	Headteacher	Mr. Russell Ball

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 24 May 2006 - 25 May 2006	Inspection number 280103
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Barclay is a popular, oversubscribed, specialist technology school with a large sixth form which is taught jointly in a consortium with neighbouring schools and a college. The numbers of students with learning difficulties, from minority ethnic groups and for whom English is not their first language are below national averages. The school has a unit for students with physical and neurological disabilities. These students are fully integrated into the life of the school and are taught in mainstream lessons.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Barclay is a good school with some outstanding features. It has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses but it has been too modest in its evaluation that it is a satisfactory school. The school works well to ensure it meets its aim to provide high quality technological education for all members of the school community through a combination of challenge, guidance and support. The school is constantly evaluating and improving the quality of education provided. Teachers reflect on their practice and recent developments have had a very marked impact upon the quality of teaching and have ensured that students' progress is good and standards improved. However standards in GCSE mathematics are low and rightly identified by the school as an area for further improvement. The school has developed a curriculum that motivates and inspires students and allows them to follow a very large range of out-of-school classes, clubs and sports. Teaching is usually good. Students' personal development and welfare are good. They enjoy and are proud of their school. Students are taught about healthy living and many follow this by choosing healthy options at lunch time and either walking or cycling to school. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. While good much of the time, some students behave inappropriately, which is a rightful concern for some parents. The school has demonstrated a good capacity to improve. It has worked hard and effectively to respond to issues from the previous inspection. Standards in Key Stage 3 have risen and assessment is used well to inform teaching. The school is very well led by the headteacher who is ably supported by his leadership team. Middle managers support curriculum areas well and subject leaders monitor and evaluate the provision for which they are responsible and to improve standards. Pastoral leadership is good and an integral part of the school's efforts to develop mature and responsible students. Governors support and challenge the school well and hold the headteacher to account for the quality of education. The school is making effective use of its specialist school status to enhance the use of technology to develop teaching and learning, and to support other schools. It makes an excellent contribution to the local community and works very well with its sponsor, a local company, to share expertise and to develop a clear understanding of the role of business. The school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is good. Students generally achieve well. They leave with standards which are broadly in line with the national average in advanced level courses and they achieve a high level success in various vocational courses. The consortium arrangements allow the school to offer a wide range of advanced-level courses and the number of intermediate and vocational courses is steadily increasing to match students' aspirations and better suit their needs. However, insufficient time is given to the teaching of religious education in the sixth form. Students' progress is monitored and recorded well and they enjoy their studies. The learning mentor has worked well to improve retention rates and students are

appreciative of the support that they receive both in their work and at a personal level. There are many opportunities for students to take responsibility, they run the school council and act as 'buddies' for younger students. By their instigation, effective training has been provided for this. Students comment that the good support and guidance they receive helps them to mature during their time in the sixth form and become more confident. The sixth form is well led and managed, working well within the consortium and often leading on developments. Provision is very effectively evaluated and takes account of student views, to identify areas needing improvement, so that effective strategies can be put into place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Reduce incidents of inappropriate behaviour by ensuring a consistent approach to classroom management.
- Increase the time available for teaching religious education in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good and improving and reflect improvements to the quality of teaching, greater challenge in lessons and a more appropriate curriculum. Students generally enter the school with standards which are broadly average; they make good progress in Key Stage 3 and gain results that are above average. Standards are rising. Improvements in Key Stage 3 last year are impacting upon the progress students make in Key Stage 4. GCSE results in 2005 showed 48% of students gained five or more higher level passes, with about three quarters of these including mathematics and English. This year school records and modular test results show a very marked improvement in standards and indicate that students make good progress. While standards in mathematics have improved, this subject is rightly identified as an area for improvement by the school. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress and looked-after children often make excellent progress, including completing advanced-level courses. In 2005 standards achieved by students at advanced-level were broadly average and results in vocational courses show students succeed well. The majority of students make good progress. The school ensures all students follow appropriate courses by careful counselling. The school sets challenging targets, including those in its specialist areas. Subjects take ownership of these and students are aware of what is expected of them. Last year the school met or was close to meeting the majority of its targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well being are good. Students appreciate and respond well to opportunities provided both in and beyond the classroom and many report that they enjoy attending school. The school meets its target for student attendance, and

punctuality is good. Relationships with teachers and among students are good. Students feel safe in the school. Behaviour is satisfactory in most lessons and good in many. Incidents of misbehaviour are generally handled appropriately and students understand the high expectations placed on them by their teachers. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. They have an appropriate awareness of their responsibilities towards each other and many contribute enthusiastically to a range of sports, arts, conferences and competitions. Sixth form students, together with volunteers from Years 10 and 11, operate a particularly effective buddy system for younger students. A letter of thanks to the school from one external partner states 'the students of Barclay School totally accept the demands of the project with maturity and dedication'. The school council is appreciated by the students and they contribute creative ideas for the improvement of the school. Learning opportunities in many lessons, including the effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, encourage students to reflect and consider their own values and attitudes. They respond with respect and interest to activities exploring different cultures and beliefs. The current initiative to provide healthy eating options is well understood by the students, and appreciated by many. This, together with challenging activities in PE and consideration of health-related topics in PSHE, enables all students to develop healthy lifestyles. Students take part in a range of very well coordinated activities which prepare them extremely well for employment and life after school. These opportunities are significantly enhanced by the school's excellent relationship with its sponsor.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan work carefully so that the needs of all students are well served. The range and variety of activities, typically found, enthuses and stimulates students' enjoyment of lessons. Frequent use of information and communication technology (ICT), electronic white boards and practical activities are key features. In the best lessons the pace of learning is brisk because work is sharply focussed into well identified episodes. However in a few cases the time allocation for tasks is too long and there is not sufficient urgency in completing them. Behaviour is generally managed well and this is helped by the supportive relationships established between students and teachers. Occasionally, a few students' behaviour is inappropriate and disrespectful. Teachers plan well to ensure that work matches the abilities of students in the class. Many students, including those who are gifted and talented have appropriate extension work or take advantage of extra master-classes. Students comment on the very good informal individual support which is willingly given out of lessons. Students, especially in the sixth form, are encouraged to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. Assessment, based on rigorous analysis of examination performance, is used well to set targets and evaluate students' achievement. Assessment is also used well in lessons to support learning. For example, teachers find opportunities for students to assess their own work and each other's

knowledge and understanding, and to suggest to each other how they can improve. Marking of students' work is good, conveys a clear indication of their standards and offers well focused advice on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of the curriculum is good and has a number of strengths. The main school provides very good opportunities for all learners, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, to progress and perform well. For example, in Key Stage 4, students are able to study either three separate sciences at GCSE or the double science award. The specialist college status of the school is reflected well in the courses followed by students in Years 10 and 11. All students study a combination of academic and vocational options including a technology course. Courses are well matched to individual needs. A small group studies at the local college for part of the week. The curriculum is enhanced by students having the opportunity to take extra GCSE courses outside the normal school times, for example, media studies and community languages. In the sixth form a wide range of advanced level courses is offered through the consortium. With a greater proportion of students staying on at the school, effective plans are in place to increase the number of courses available to extend the variety of suitable progression routes from September 2006. However, insufficient time is given to the teaching religious education in the sixth form. Extra-curricular activities include a variety of out of school clubs, visits and extended trips. Particular strengths of the enrichment programme are the very strong and beneficial links with the sponsor. These involve staff from the company working in the school, students from the school visiting the company and also a number of projects to promote understanding as, for example, in art, music and robotic technology. The three enrichment days held in the summer term are part of a well structured careers and enterprise programme. This greatly complements the care and guidance provided by the school, with outstanding opportunities for personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school has created a safe environment, in which procedures for minimising risk and ensuring the well-being of students are very secure. The school's concern with student safety is exemplified by its involvement in managing traffic beyond the school grounds. The staff reflect very carefully on their practice and constantly seek to improve arrangements for the support of individual students. The school has created a very effective learning support team which is rapidly developing strong working arrangements with class teachers, external agencies and parents. Comprehensive training for child protection has been undertaken, and is extended to all staff as they are appointed. The most vulnerable students in the school are provided with excellent support, including personalised teaching, support for attendance and the development of sensitive relationships with parents and carers.

These all help to ensure that the students make good progress. Students report little experience of bullying and are confident that any incidents are dealt with promptly and thoroughly. Arrangements for the assessment of progress provide tutors with a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses in individual students' performance. A well targeted system of mentoring for individual students has been implemented and is currently being extended. Appropriate advice and support are provided for students at transition points in their school life and students value the approachability of teachers when personal advice is required. Good account is taken of students' views in both the development of the curriculum and in organising arrangements around the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and promote effectively improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the raising of standards. An ethos of self improvement pervades the school. Staff are keen to improve their expertise and make good use of the materials from the Secondary National Strategy. The school makes very good use of its specialist school status to work closely with its sponsor and this relationship has a positive impact upon standards. The school is very well led by an effective headteacher who is very ably supported by a dynamic senior leadership team. Middle management and the monitoring of teaching and learning are good. Middle managers analyse examination and assessment data well and use these effectively to monitor students' achievement. They evaluate the curriculum to identify issues for improvement and then work with their teams to ensure the quality of the provision gets better and standards are raised. The leadership team has a very accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses but is sometimes too modest with its overall judgements. It has formulated a comprehensive plan on how to improve including clear measurable success criteria. The governing body supports the school well and holds it to account, providing good support and challenge for the headteacher. The school has very effectively sought the views of students and parents, assisted by the use of an online survey, which has informed areas for improvement. Examples of these are changes to the sixth form curriculum and the change from subject parents' evenings to assessment review days which many parents find useful. However some parents and students feel their views have not always been given sufficient consideration. In the sixth form overall leadership is good and routine arrangements are very well managed. Good use is made of monitoring information to raise achievement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your very positive responses and welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting with you and your teachers. Your comments helped us to gain a clear understanding of school life, and what you enjoy and value in school. We thought that your school is a good school, with some outstanding features, of which you can rightly be proud. The school works well to ensure it meets its aim to provide high quality technological education for all members of the school community through a combination of challenge, guidance and support. Your positive comments show how much you like school and appreciate the work of the staff. You work well with your teachers to make sure that the school is a stimulating and interesting place. We were particularly impressed with the way in which you support the local community and work well with a local business. This also helps you prepare for the world of work. We were pleased to see how you could influence what happens in school and how you take health issues very seriously, for example how many of you cycle or walk to school. You enjoyed some very interesting lessons and activities with some good teaching and a varied curriculum, including a very large variety of extra-curricular clubs and sports, which many of you enjoy. Your school is very well led and knows its strengths as well as the areas it wants to improve. As in nearly all schools, there are areas that could be better. The school needs to improve standards in mathematics and to ensure sufficient time is given to the teaching of religious education in the sixth form. Some of you also need to take more responsibility for your actions by making sure you do not distract others by inappropriate behaviour. We wish you well for the future and hope you enjoy and are successful at this very caring and supportive school.