



Barr's Hill School and Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103727
Local Authority Coventry
Inspection number 286737
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Radford Road
School category	Community		Coventry
Age range of pupils	11–18		CV1 4BU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	024 76234600
Number on roll (school)	545	Fax number	024 76234609
Number on roll (6th form)	77		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	S Hanson
		Headteacher	Robin Brabban
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	21–22 February 2007	286737

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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

Barr's Hill School and Community College is a small 11-18 inner city school serving a community amongst the most socially and economically disadvantaged in England. The site provides a pleasant learning environment. Pupils of all abilities from diverse backgrounds attend the school. Pupil mobility is high.

The school is a Full Service Extended School. It works well with community partners and as part of the North West Federation of Coventry schools to increase learning opportunities for pupils and the local community. The school is seeking Specialist School Status in Engineering (Construction).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Barr's Hill School and Community College is a good school that successfully meets the diverse needs of its pupils. One parent described the school as, 'A warm and welcoming school'. It is a good school because it cares strongly for all its pupils and, as a consequence, they all do well. Pupils behave well, are courteous to staff and visitors, and adopt positive attitudes to learning. The small size of the school means that every individual pupil is known well by all of the staff. Most of the pupils have low levels of attainment when they start the school and make good progress across Years 7 to 9. By the time they leave the school, either at age 16 or 18, they achieve standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. This is a considerable achievement, especially as nearly a quarter of the pupils did not start at Barr's Hill. Some came to the school as they were experiencing problems in other schools, and some are recent arrivals in this country. Even though some of these pupils have limited English, the good pastoral and academic support that is provided by the school enables them to settle quickly and make good progress. There are a few more able pupils throughout the school, however, who are not sufficiently challenged.

This positive support is due to the clear vision and direction of the headteacher, who leads the school well. His collegiate approach to management means that his senior team and middle managers all share in the responsibility for making sure that the school is always striving to get better. They share his dedication and aspiration to raise standards and improve the life chances for all pupils. They also know their strengths as a school and what they still need to do, such as continuing the drive for even higher standards of attainment for all pupils. All the points for improvement from the last inspection have been addressed successfully.

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, although good and even outstanding teaching was observed by inspectors. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching does not always identify areas for improvement precisely enough to improve the overall consistency of teaching throughout the school. Teachers are, however, constantly taking on new challenges. Supporting individual pupils is at the centre of the school's philosophy. As a result, the curriculum is constantly being reviewed to ensure relevance. New courses are started, or if not available in the school, provided by another school or further education college in the North West Federation of Schools. This partnership, working with a wide range of other schools and agencies, is strong and an outstanding feature of the provision. The Full Service Extended School provision is another example of the extra mile that the school goes to support its pupils. Courses, activities, room lettings, revision sessions, meeting spaces, holiday and weekend activities all take place at the school. The local policeman is also based at the school. These positive initiatives are all raising standards and improving community relations. The school offers good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is good.

The small but growing sixth form operates within an efficient federation of eight schools. A wide range of courses is offered with many at advanced level. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Although there is an open access policy, good guidance ensures that courses are well matched to students' capabilities. Good teaching, coupled with a high level of support for individuals, enables students to achieve well and attain results in line with the national average. The sixth form offers good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Disseminate the good teaching practice to all staff to ensure that all have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Provide more challenge for the higher attaining pupils in all lessons.
- Devise a more rigorous management system for monitoring the quality of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils achieve well across Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. The great majority of them make good progress.

Pupils enter the school with standards that are well below average and few have higher level skills. Weaknesses in literacy, particularly writing, constrain standards. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, standards are below average, but this represents good achievement, given the low prior attainment. Targets are challenging. In 2006, the target in science was surpassed while in English and mathematics targets were narrowly missed.

Standards in GCSE have shown strong improvement in recent years and are now broadly average. In 2005, the school enjoyed its best ever results by a significant margin. Whilst attainment dipped slightly in 2006, this still represented good achievement overall. Evidence gathered during the inspection showed that this good progress is being maintained. Pupils are on course to achieve their challenging targets. The small number of higher attaining pupils make satisfactory progress and need more challenge. Others, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well.

Those students who decide to join the sixth form in the school enter with standards below the national level. Good teaching and support enable students to make good progress. Grades attained are in line with the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good in the main school and in the sixth form.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Assemblies encourage pupils to reflect on their lives. This unites the many faiths represented in the school. For example, pupils considered fasting in different religions on Ash Wednesday. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and the school rightly takes pride in the marked reduction of name-calling. Pupils behave well, making the school a calm and orderly environment, promoting learning. Pupils learn from the very wide range of cultures represented in the school's population and this is augmented by many other cultural and educational visits. For example, four Year 9 girls met the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu at a conference in the USA as part of their work on establishing peace partnerships.

Over an extended period of time, the school has improved attendance. From a position in which nearly one out of every five days was missed, attendance has risen to being above the national average. A significant factor in the improvement has been the determined efforts to make the curriculum more relevant to pupils. Some of these courses, such as construction and beauty care, are taught at other educational institutions.

Pupils say they enjoy their education. They understand well what constitutes safe practices and a healthy lifestyle. They welcome the recent changes in the canteen and more pupils are now choosing healthy options. Participation in sport is high with well over half participating in additional sporting activities. Pupils play a valuable part in their local community, for example, Year 10 pupils take drama productions to local primary schools and fund-raising for charities is impressive. The school council has recently been reconstituted. It is beginning to play a part in the life of the school, for example, by instigating the decoration of toilets.

Workplace skills are well developed. All pupils take part in a well organised work experience programme. Pupils respond well when asked to work independently. Literacy and numerical skills are broadly average by the time pupils leave the school. Many pupils who enter university represent the first generation of their family to do so. The number of pupils not continuing in education or entering work with training after leaving the school is very low.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Some teaching is good, especially in the sixth form. In some lessons, the teacher's good planning ensures that the learning activities are well matched to the clear objectives for the lesson and pupils' learning needs. Here, learning is consolidated by the constant revisiting of learning objectives and assessment of the progress being made. Some teachers are adept in the teaching of basic literacy skills, which has made a positive contribution to the progress of some groups of pupils. Some teachers provide pupils with opportunities to learn actively and to think creatively about how to improve their attainment. However, in a number of less successful lessons, the objectives are often too vague to give learning real direction and progress is too slow to raise attainment further. Too much time is spent listening to the teacher. Pupils follow passively and there is not enough challenge to achieve at a higher level. Not all teachers encourage pupils to learn independently.

Some teachers adapt their lessons skilfully in response to assessment information, ensuring that what they know about the pupils influences the content of the lesson and the way it is taught. Much marking is constructive and of benefit but some pupils' books do not contain enough assessed work or sufficient comments to support progress. The use of assessment during lessons is inconsistent. In some lessons, teacher, peer and self-assessment helps pupils to improve immediately but in many lessons it is limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good, both in the main school and in the sixth form. The school has been successful in developing a very diverse curriculum that meets the wide range of needs of its pupils, allowing them to follow different learning pathways according to their ability, aspirations and interests. This is commendable in a relatively small school.

Work-related learning, including work experience, makes good provision for the pupils. Vocational courses provide the necessary diversity to encourage pupils to remain engaged with education, sustain good attendance at school and have good attitudes to learning. These courses have helped raise attainment overall. The school has a good understanding of the need to prioritise the acquisition of the key skill of literacy to prepare pupils for future economic well-being. Literacy skills are taught well.

Pupils' prior attainment has been taken into account in planning the flexible curriculum. The school makes good provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities, pupils who do not join the school at conventional times, and pupils who need support in the acquisition of spoken and written English.

The Full Service Extended School clubs, some of which are led by sixth form students, provide a good range of additional and out-of-hours learning and enrichment opportunities. These involve sport, leisure and cultural activities and also support classroom learning. All have a high level of participation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for learners are good. The school commits much time and energy to this aspect of its work. It involves a range of adults who work well together to safeguard pupils' welfare and well being, especially of those more vulnerable pupils. This has created a learning environment in which pupils feel secure. Parents report that 'staff listen and want to make a difference,' and this is evident in the lessons observed.

The school's tracking of pupils' progress is effective and provides staff with a clear view of which pupils need to be challenged and supported. Pupils value the support they are given and praise the days for setting targets. They are aware of their targets and say they know what they need to do to improve. In good lessons, teaching is focused on attaining targets.

Pupils say they receive sufficient advice and guidance to make informed choices about options and careers. Teachers' aspirations for pupils are high and this is a key feature of good lessons. Procedures to identify pupils who are at risk or in need of additional support are effective. Good provision is made for students with specific learning difficulties and disabilities and records show that most make good progress. The school works effectively to ensure that pupils whose first language is other than English and those children in public care receive appropriate academic and personal support, so they can succeed. Teaching assistants work productively and they have a positive impact on the pupils they support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads with vision and purpose and is ably supported by a committed senior management team. All have clear roles and responsibilities. Over the last few years, the leadership and management of the school have been successful in significantly improving standards of attainment so that all pupils are now achieving well. They are not just content to rest on this level of achievement but are striving for even higher standards. The Full Service Extended School provision has had a major impact on the school and its community and involved more parents in the life of the school. The school is about to apply for Engineering (Construction) specialist school status, and this will provide another catalyst and challenge for improvement.

The school's self-evaluation is largely accurate in its overall judgements. The self-evaluation process is also used by subject leaders and, whilst at an early stage of development and variable in quality, is becoming an increasingly useful tool for departmental review and development planning. Performance is monitored regularly and challenging targets are set for whole-school achievement. The monitoring of teaching, however, requires a sharper focus and more dissemination of the best teaching practice within the school. The nature of the small cohorts makes precise setting of whole-school targets for overall results in subjects difficult. The success of one child can add or subtract one percentage point to the statistics and cohorts vary enormously from year to year due to the high mobility of pupils. However, with its successes to date and its determination to improve, the management has an undoubted capacity to further improve provision and raise standards in the school. It knows that continuing to have higher expectations of the quality of teaching will be the driving factor.

Governance is good. Governors challenge the management to account for the standards pupils achieve. There is a full governing body and they support the work of the school well.

The range of links and partnerships with external agencies the school has developed is outstanding. All have a significant part to play in improving standards at Barr's Hill. All see their role as contributing to the big picture of developing young people to take their place in society. One partner described Barr's Hill as, 'A school where children thrive'. They enjoy working with Barr's Hill pupils and speak highly of the respect they have for the staff and pupils. Parents, too, are full of praise for what the school does for their children. One parent commented, 'Form tutors care about the individual pupil. They know every child well.'

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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?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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 to below 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	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Barr's Hill School and Community College, Radford Road, Coventry CV1 4BU

Thank you for welcoming us to your school in February. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know what we thought about your school and how we felt it could become even better.

- Your parents think you go to a good school and we agree.
- Your teachers work hard for you.
- Most of you behave well.
- Most of you looked very smart in your school uniform and were very confident to talk to us when we visited.
- We were impressed with the wide range of opportunities you have, to take part in activities out of school time. More of you should take advantage of this, especially study opportunities for the upper school.
- Older pupils have a good range of opportunities in Barr's Hill and other local schools and colleges, to follow courses that will help them get jobs and move into further education when they leave school.
- A lot of you get good support from teachers and other adults to help you catch up quickly when you need extra support.
- The school grounds are attractive and you take pride in learning in a pleasant environment.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher and staff to do the following:

- work together to make all your subject lessons as good as the best
- provide more challenge for those of you who could do harder work
- check the quality of lessons more closely to ensure they continue to improve.