

Barclay School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117515
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326633
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1113
Sixth form	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Boakes
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Beacom
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	Walkern Road Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 3RB
Telephone number	01438 232221
Fax number	01438 232300

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The school was invited to nominate a member of the senior management team to join inspectors in all aspects of their work; the deputy headteacher accepted this role.

Description of the school

The school is significantly larger than average. The students' social and economic backgrounds vary but are average overall. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The numbers of girls and boys in each year group varies annually. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds has risen in recent years but remains below the national figure, as does the proportion of those whose first language is not English.

The proportion of students registered by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is small. Attainment on entry is average and has been so for five years. There are a small number of looked after children in each year group.

The school has been granted technology specialist status and has received the following national accreditations: Investors in People, Artsmark Silver, Healthy School Status, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Most Improved Schools Club.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with a number of good features. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection; behaviour is now good overall and the range of curriculum opportunities has been enhanced by the introduction of the new Diploma courses.

Academic outcomes remain below the national average in the main school, although students make satisfactory progress. However, examination outcomes already secured for 2009 in English, mathematics and some of the specialist technology subjects are closer to the national average than those gained in previous years. The progress made by students in the sixth form, at A level, was above average.

The students' personal development is good overall. Attendance has improved and is above average. Behaviour is good overall, although some parents raised questions on this matter. The students' care, welfare and guidance are good, with particular strengths in the pastoral care for those with significant social and emotional needs.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with over half the lessons seen judged to be good or better. A third of lessons could have been more effective if the match of task to the students' learning needs had been stronger. Where opportunities to enhance teaching and learning were missed, insufficient attention was given to student involvement and independent learning. Sixth form teaching was predominately good. The range of curriculum provision is good with the introduction of the new national pilot Diploma courses in all available areas. However, tutor time is of inconsistent quality and personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons fail to access accredited outcomes. Post-16 curriculum collaborations are facilitated by local consortia arrangements. Community cohesion is outstanding because of the way the school provides significant opportunities for vulnerable groups of young adults and the manner in which collaboration with local industry provides European and global opportunities to students and staff.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher and her senior staff have made solid progress on the key issues for development given at the last inspection, but academic outcomes have been hindered by limitations in the target-setting process and the use of curriculum time; capacity to improve is satisfactory. Governors had not submitted to schools financial management system the required external evaluation prior to this inspection. However, the school began the process during the completion of this report. The school's evaluations of standards and achievement and the quality of teaching and learning were more positive than the judgments given in this report.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Approximately half of Year 11 students enter the sixth form each year and their attainment on entry is below average to broadly average. Although progress in Year 12 varies by subject, by the end of Year 13 achievement is good, particularly for the more able students. Overall, standards at A Level are firmly in line with the national average. Two thirds of learners follow academic courses, with the remainder studying vocational ones. Retention of students is high and all but a few successfully finish their courses; just over half transfer to higher education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Striking features of the most successful lessons include very good relationships, where students are encouraged to work independently with

teachers supporting them through very effective questioning. Most students feel that teachers are supportive, know them well and regularly review their progress. Effective systems of assessment and target setting contribute well to students' achievement in some subjects; however, this remains inconsistent across subjects. Students enjoy their sixth form studies and comment that teaching is well matched to their needs with one saying that 'teachers know their subjects well'. Since the last inspection, a programme has been introduced to ensure that religious education is made available to all sixth form students through a conference approach.

Leadership and management are good. The range of curriculum opportunities provided through the local 16 to 19 consortium is good. There is a broad range of academic and vocational courses, including many at Level 2 and 3, that meet the needs of current students well. Around 85% of lessons take place at Barclay School, with the remainder at other schools in the partnership. Some students find it difficult to maintain concentration in the four-hour lessons.

What the school should do to improve further

- Complete the required financial assessment process as a matter of urgency.
- Improve standards and achievement by making better use of accredited courses in the significant curriculum time available for PSHE and tutorials.
- Enhance the match of tasks to the students learning needs so that all lessons provide good learning opportunities across the range of abilities.
- Make consistent use of the recently developed pupil-tracking and target-setting system to inform teachers planning and to enhance the students learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

In the 2008 public examinations, the percentage of students securing the national benchmark of five higher grade GCSEs that included English and mathematics, 40%, although showing some improvement on previous performance, was below the national average. The students' performance, as measured by the points scored in public examinations was below the national average; girls in particular underachieved. The performance of students receiving specialist support from the school indicates that some students of average academic ability were wrongly classified as requiring additional support.

Students from different ethnic minority groups performed at least as well and often significantly better than their white British peers. Asian students from an Indian ethnic background performed above the school average and above the average for their peers nationally. Standards are broadly average and students make generally average progress between Years 7 and 11. However, in Key Stage 4, allocation of a significant proportion of the school week to courses without any form of accreditation significantly hinders academic outcomes.

In 2008, GCSE relative performance of students was more successful in science, physical education and art than in mathematics, English and communications studies. Initial indications from modular examinations and early entry GCSEs indicate that some of the underperformance evident in the 2008 data has been addressed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The majority of students enjoy their lessons and the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities offered to them. They value the support which they receive and the good relationships they have with their teachers. Most students behave well in lessons and around the school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are courteous and supportive of each other, and the atmosphere around the school is harmonious and purposeful. In lessons and assemblies, they reflect upon events, moral and cultural issues and share thoughts and feelings well. Students have many opportunities to learn about other cultural backgrounds through links with the community and an extensive programme of educational travel, at home and abroad. Sixth form students provide very good role models as mentors and are actively involved in supporting younger students and those who are vulnerable. Students feel valued because their views are taken seriously, for example in relation to curricular changes, the quality of teaching and learning they receive and the appointment of new teachers. They learn about their rights and responsibilities appropriately and make regular contributions to the wider community through, for example, regular fund-raising activities, musical performances and working with students in primary and special schools.

There is a strong awareness of the importance of healthy living in an eco friendly environment. As members of the school council and Eco Council, students have been actively involved in designing a healthy menu for the canteen, as well as recycling waste materials and promoting energy saving measures for the school. The majority of students are also keen to participate in the wide variety of extra-curricular sporting activities. Students are prepared appropriately for life after school through careers education, with the strong support of the Connexion Service. Through the school's specialist technology status, some students are offered additional opportunities to develop their social skills, self-confidence and leadership qualities through excellent links with local business and the help of the school's sponsor.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Secure teaching enables students to make satisfactory progress. Although the school's view of the quality of teaching and learning is over generous, more than half the lessons seen were judged good or better. Good relationships permeate lessons and set a positive climate for learning. Classroom management is strong and students' learning is rarely, if ever, disrupted by poor or inappropriate behaviour. Most lessons are well planned and teachers share the learning objectives with students from the outset, so they are generally clear about the purpose of the lesson. Good subject knowledge enables teachers to explain key ideas well, to develop skills effectively and to build on previous knowledge. In English, a particularly well-managed synthesis of a novel provided students with real insight into the nature of human behaviour. However, in too many lessons students take a passive, rather than active role. Teachers spend much of the time leading from the front instead of encouraging students to work independently and in groups. Lesson planning does not always take account of the range of students' prior attainment in order to match tasks to individuals' learning needs. This especially applies to the gifted and talented students. Features of weaker lessons include lack of engagement, pace and challenge. In these lessons, students do not make the progress expected. Most students know what level or grade they are working at and, in some subjects, what they have to do to improve.

For example, in the humanities and physical education, assessment for learning is strong. The quality of marking remains inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The students benefit from a broad curriculum. The introduction of diplomas at Key Stages 4 and 5 has increased flexibility and provided qualifications for students in Years 10 to 13. This has in turn raised the aspirations of students. The take up for modern foreign languages is very disappointing and has been so for some years; however, increasing numbers of students have chosen French or Spanish for September 2009.

The school is a hub school in the local extended school group and works very well with other providers, including local colleges, schools and local businesses. This has enhanced the school's local apprenticeship provision, work-related learning and work placements. Community projects include the 'Wheels' project, a local charity, where the school works with a wide range of community members to develop skills in motor mechanics, information and control technology, and cookery.

There are many exciting opportunities for curriculum enrichment. For example, a group of students is currently visiting Dallas, USA, to participate as a competitive entry in the Vex Robot Club. The school's specialist technology status has a positive impact, particularly in work with local partnership schools. These links allow local primary schools to use science facilities and provide a specialist mathematics teacher to enhance primary school numeracy levels. The school's very good links with a local multinational engineering company are effective in extending the technology specialism into business studies and art. The school provides a very wide range of sport and extra-curricular activities in which many students participate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is an inclusive school, with a particularly strong pastoral system in which staff are fully committed to the care and welfare of all students. The students confirm that they enjoy school and feel safe, as there are always adults available to give support whether their needs are academic, personal or emotional. Although there are some parental concerns about bullying, students confirm that these incidents are rare, and are dealt with promptly and effectively when they occur. The school's excellent 'Parentline Plus' scheme provides outstanding personalized advice to students and their parents when additional support is needed.

Arrangements to provide a smooth entry to the school in Year 7, and for students joining at a later date, are good. The school's child protection procedures and health and safety practices are secure and understood by all staff. The completion of risk assessments is tightly monitored.

Students who need additional help with their learning and those at an early stage of learning English receive well-targeted additional support and, as a result, achieve as well as their peers. However, administrative errors in the classification of some of the 2008 Year 11 students meant that some able students who secured five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics, were classified as having learning difficulties. Vulnerable and looked after students and those who are carers are carefully monitored and the school uses outside agencies very well to give them the support that they need. The school's Learning Support is effective in helping identified students improve their behaviour and return to their lessons. As a result, the school has reduced the number of persistent non-attendees and exclusions. Through a robust monitoring system

and close links with parents, attendance is now above average. Punctuality, however, is still an issue: a significant number of students were late for school on the first day of the inspection.

Students are given clear information when making option choices and have good access to careers advice to help inform their future decisions. A system of target setting and tracking students' progress has now been established. There are, however, inconsistencies in the quality of academic guidance between departments. Students do not always receive constructive advice on how to improve their work and how to reach their targets in order to have a significant impact on their performance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior staff have done well to manage the introduction of the new Diploma courses and improve both attendance and attitudes to learning. Some aspects of self-evaluation were more generous than the judgements given by inspectors; others were more modest. The proportion of students who attained the national benchmark of five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics was significantly below the national average. The significant time allocated to PSHE courses and the tutorial process does not secure any of the available accredited qualifications and as such hinders pupil progress. Senior leaders are aware of this issue. The school is reviewing the use of tutorial time for mentoring and target setting and the introduction of additional accredited courses. The school set the 2008 and 2009 academic targets below the level expected of secondary schools but has adjusted this for 2010.

Governance is satisfactory with a strong focus on improving provision. The governing body and the headteacher have worked hard to guide the school through the national Building Schools for the Future initiative; however, the school's Grade 2 Listed Building status is causing delays in both the completion of this work and a number of aspects of curriculum development. The school's budget maintains a small surplus. However, the governors have not submitted the school's financial management process to the required external scrutiny. Value for money is sound.

The school provided a senior management team nominee to join the inspection team and the deputy headteacher played a full part in the inspection process. Senior and middle managers were involved in the joint observations of lessons with inspectors. A formal evaluation of this exercise by inspectors and senior staff revealed that many of the lessons could have secured a higher grading if greater emphasis had been given to matching the task to the students learning needs.

The school is a calm and orderly community. The management of pupil behaviour is effective, and relationships are good. Curriculum development has been impressive in some areas and the range of post-16 opportunities available is good.

Community cohesion is outstanding because Barclay uses its specialist facilities and expertise effectively to support feeder schools and community groups, whilst working with local industries on an international basis. Through the extended school responsibilities and specialist school status the school provides a strong programme of activities to meet local needs.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Barclay School, Stevenage, SG1 3RB

Thank you for the way so many of you contributed to the inspection of the school. Your personal comments and the insights you offered were particularly helpful, thank you. It was a real pleasure to see the calm and relaxed manner in which you moved around the school and we judged your behaviour to be good.

The school provides you with a good choice of subjects in the curriculum but I was very disappointed that so many do not choose to study a modern foreign language. The new Diploma courses appear to have started well and many of you appreciate the way these courses involve you in your own learning. Inspectors were pleased with the progress made by sixth form students and found the school's contribution to the community to be outstanding.

The inspectors found all areas of the school to be satisfactory and there were a number of good features. I have asked the headteacher and the governors to:

- complete an important assessment of the school's financial management systems as soon as possible
- improve the number of qualifications you obtain by introducing opportunities to take exams related to your PSHE lessons and tutorials
- ensure the tasks you are given in all lessons provide appropriate challenge and good opportunities to learn
- make consistent use of the recently developed student tracking system to help teachers' planning and enhance your learning.

Those of you who arrive late for school in the mornings can play your part in this process with a small but timely effort each day. I look forward to hearing about your future success.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector