

Baxter College

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 135062 |
| Local Authority | Worcestershire |
| Inspection number | 329022 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 January 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | David Driscoll |

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

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|---|---|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1032 |
| Sixth form | 112 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Jackie Winter |
| Headteacher | David Seddon |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Habberley Road Kidderminster DY11 5PQ |
| Telephone number | 01562 741524 |
| Fax number | 01562 827719 |

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Baxter College was opened in September 2007 to serve the western side of Kidderminster. It is a specialist business and enterprise college. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, the largest group having behavioural difficulties. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Baxter College provides a satisfactory education. The students who left Year 11 did so with very low standards, and did not do well enough in mathematics and science. The school's managers have tackled the staffing and curriculum issues in these subjects, so the curriculum and teaching are now satisfactory. Current standards are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement, given students' below average standards on joining the school. Standards are below average in most subjects in the sixth form, which also represents satisfactory progress. However, results are boosted considerably by the very good performance in general studies and, overall, are average.

Students' personal development is satisfactory as a result of the sound care, guidance and support they receive. Students have a good understanding of their role in the community and play a good part in both the school and wider communities. They enjoy coming to school and taking part in the very many extra activities that are on offer. Teachers and students get on well with one another. However, students' attendance is inadequate, in both the main school and sixth form, and not improving. The automated telephone calls that parents receive are not effective in conveying the college's concerns when students are absent. Data are not analysed well enough to identify emerging trends, so the rate of persistent absenteeism (the proportion of students who miss at least one day a week on average) is very high. Lessons often start late because the students do not arrive on time, either because the previous lesson has overrun or because they have not moved quickly enough.

The college's specialist status has been used well to promote enterprise-based activities across the curriculum that provide students with a good insight into the world of work. However, their preparation for their next stage of learning or employment is no better than satisfactory because of some other weaknesses. Students in both the main school and the sixth form find it difficult to work on their own initiative. They have few opportunities to develop independent learning skills across the curriculum and the teacher does too much for them in lessons. Insufficient use is made of homework to promote skills such as research or to instil a good work ethic beyond the classroom.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Many new initiatives have been started and some, such as the outstanding systems for tracking students' progress, are clearly improving the quality of education offered. However, the impact of these initiatives is not always evaluated in terms of the impact they have on raising standards or improving personal development. So, the college's leaders, including governors, are not completely sure if the actions they are taking are proving successful.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students join the sixth form with standards that are below average. They make satisfactory progress in most of their subjects, as a result of the satisfactory curriculum and teaching, and standards in most subjects remain below average on leaving. All students also study general studies, and do very well. This boosts the overall A-level results to a level that is in line with the national average. Teachers know their subjects well and have good relationships with their students. Their delivery of lesson content is clear and well paced. However, they do not expect students to do enough for themselves, either in lessons or in private study. Attendance is low

for sixth form students, and this shows in the students' portfolios which contain gaps and unfinished work. Portfolios are also disorganised, because they are not checked sufficiently frequently. Students concentrate well and work hard at their studies, but do not play a leading role in the college community. The links forged with other providers ensure a good range of courses from which students can choose. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Checks on teaching are identifying the strengths and main areas for improvement, but the impact of initiatives taken to improve standards is not always evaluated sufficiently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Analyse attendance data more rigorously to identify emerging trends of poor attendance and ensure parents are contacted promptly by a member of staff when their child is absent.
- Ensure students develop their independent learning skills by giving them more opportunities to work on their own initiative in lessons and through frequent and regular homework tasks.
- Evaluate more thoroughly the impact of any actions taken to improve standards and the quality of education provided.
- Ensure lessons finish on time and that students are given more encouragement to be punctual to lessons.

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

The college's first year of GCSE results were very disappointing and students did not do as well as they should have. The proportion gaining five or more good GCSEs was as expected, and below average. However, the proportion leaving with at least five good GCSEs including English and mathematics was very low, because students underachieved in mathematics. Almost a third of the mathematics teachers left part-way through the year, because of promotion or illness, which badly disrupted pupils' progress. The college met most of its appropriately challenging targets for its specialist status, but fell well short in mathematics. Results in science were also very poor, because students followed a complex curriculum that did not meet their needs and caused complications in the examination entry procedure. These deficiencies have now been rectified. The progress of students in all years, as seen in their work and demonstrated by the college's comprehensive tracking systems, is now satisfactory. Standards are now below average in all years, including in mathematics and science, and this represents satisfactory achievement, given below average standards on joining the school. Most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, but those in Years 7 and 8 do well because the curriculum has been adapted to better meet their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, and put this into practice when choosing food. Many take part in sporting activities and enjoy their physical education lessons. They know how to stay safe, but do not always take enough care on corridors when moving between lessons. This often occurs when students stop for a chat and form a group that blocks the corridor. In turn, this prevents them, and those around them, from reaching their lessons punctually. Students have a good understanding of other communities. Excellent

links have been forged with other schools around the country using the college's specialist status, so students can visit areas where there is a different ethnic and religious mix to their own, or to schools where students have higher aspirations. Students play a good role in the local community, such as by training as dance leaders and helping others to develop their skills. Behaviour is satisfactory, and good in the sixth form. Parents are concerned about poor behaviour and its effect on learning. However, the great majority of lessons proceed smoothly with very little disruption as students concentrate on their work. Most incidents occur outside of lessons, where those with difficulties in controlling their behaviour are in a less structured environment, and are swiftly dealt with. Students know the difference between right and wrong, but do not always think before acting when they start to lose their temper. Students' attendance is poor. It was well below average in 2008, and this year shows no improvement. Much of the absenteeism is because around one in every seven pupils is a persistent absentee. Attendance is also low in the sixth form, but as a result of odd days being missed rather than persistent absence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Students are always clear about what they are to do in lessons, because teachers make very clear what they are to be learning. The tasks are usually matched to the students' ability, but sometimes the same task is given to the whole class, so some find it too easy and some too hard. Students listen well to their teachers and occasionally ask questions. This is when teachers demonstrate their good knowledge of the subject they teach, by being able to respond without any reference to notes, especially in the sixth form. However, it is rare for students to ask questions and too often their involvement is limited to short answers to a teacher's direct question, with the teacher completing the answer rather than making the student think for themselves. Parents are rightly concerned about the lack of homework. It is set frequently and regularly in English and in design and technology, but not in many other subjects. Homework tasks do not place enough emphasis on developing skills such as research and comprehension, which would help students to become more independent learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The college has adapted its curriculum well in Years 7 and 8 to better meet the needs of students who are joining with weak basic skills in literacy and numeracy. As a result, progress is good in English and mathematics in these years, especially for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In all years, students are not given enough opportunities to develop their independent learning skills. It is very rare for students to be allowed, for example, to go to the library to find information for themselves. The curriculum develops a good understanding of enterprise by using examples from business whenever appropriate in lessons. The strength of the curriculum lies in the huge range of extra clubs and activities on offer. Every member of staff offers at least one club, and these are very popular with students of all ages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The college provides students with good guidance on healthy living. Students feel safe and are confident that incidents of bullying will be dealt with effectively. Child protection procedures meet requirements. Students receive good encouragement to continue with their studies into and beyond the sixth form. The school goes to good lengths to make sure that time is not lost through students being excluded, and the rate of exclusions is around half the national average. Actions to improve attendance are not effective. Too many pupils are absent each day for the clerical assistant to contact by telephone, so an automated message is sent. This informs parents of absence, but does not have the same impact as a member of staff asking questions about reasons for absence or encouraging the student back to school. Data on attendance are not analysed sufficiently. For example, staff felt that attendance had not improved because there was more illness, but this is not the case. The attendance of some persistent absentees is improving, but the college is not identifying quickly enough others whose attendance is falling, who then become persistent absentees themselves. Outstanding systems are in place to track students' progress. The resulting data are used to set targets for every student each half term. The targets make clear exactly what students who are falling behind have to do to catch up, but for other students they are too vague.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The college's leaders have a sound understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Good systems are in place to check the quality of teaching, which provide an accurate picture of the areas for improvement, both for individuals and for the college as a whole. However, the main areas for improvement do not then feature in the college development plan, so actions planned to bring about improvement are not as successful as they could be. Many new initiatives are being taken to improve the quality of education offered, but their effectiveness is not being evaluated sufficiently in terms of the impact they have on raising standards. For example, the college has carried out an audit of the needs of the local community to find out what needs to be done to promote community cohesion. Good actions have been taken to improve on a local, national and global level, but nobody has checked to see how successful the actions have been. The college's leaders have successfully tackled the weaknesses that resulted in lower than expected examination results in 2008, and have demonstrated satisfactory capacity to improve the college further.

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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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | NA | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 3 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 | 3 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | 3 |
| 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? | 3 | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 3 | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 4 | 4 |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 | 3 |

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 3 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 3 | |
| 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**

28 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Baxter College, Kidderminster, DY11 5PQ

Many thanks for talking to us and giving us your views when we visited your college recently. We found that you are receiving a satisfactory education and making progress at the same rate as most other students of your age. You told us that you enjoy coming to college because you get on well with your teachers and there are lots of extra clubs and activities that you can take part in. Too many of you, however, including sixth formers, do not come to college as often as you can or get to lessons on time. We have asked the people who run the college to telephone your parents if you are absent, watch out for signs that your attendance is getting worse and help you to be more punctual to lessons. You can help yourselves by not taking days off when you could be in college and not stopping for a chat when you should be getting to lessons.

In all years you rely too much on your teachers when you could be thinking for yourselves. So we have asked your teachers to give you more tasks, both in lessons and for homework, which let you work on your own initiative, things like research and using computers and the library more often. The links that the college has with other schools around the country ensure that you have a good understanding of life in different areas. You also know a lot about business and enterprise, because lots of your teachers use examples from business in your lessons.

The GCSE exam results were not as good as they should have been last year. However, the people who run the college have sorted the problems out, so the standards you are currently reaching are much better. We know this because the college has really good systems for checking on your progress. Lots of changes are taking place as the staff try to give you the best possible education. However, the people who run the college are not always checking to see if the changes they make are really working. So we have asked them to make sure that when they put something new in place, they also find out if it works.

With all best wishes for your futures

David Driscoll

Lead inspector