

Barr Beacon School

Old Hall Lane, Aldridge, Walsall, WS9 0RF

Inspection dates 9–10 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Achievement is outstanding. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is above national average and represents outstanding progress when compared to schools nationally and similar schools.
- All groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs and those eligible for additional government funding, make rapid and sustained progress.
- Teaching is consistently at least good and very frequently outstanding. Teachers' subject knowledge, planning, use of questioning and oral feedback to students during lessons are particularly strong.
- While there are examples of exemplary practice, not all marking is of the highest quality.
- The sixth form is good. Achievement of students is at least good and improving rapidly because of outstanding teaching and well-targeted support. Strong links with universities, colleges of further education and local industries, together with excellent guidance mean that practically all students progress to career routes of their choice.
- The behaviour of students around school and in lessons is outstanding. They are exceptionally polite and courteous to adults and to one another; their very positive attitudes to learning help them to make excellent progress. There is a harmonious and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school.
- The curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of all students. It provides breadth and balance through a wide range of academic and vocational courses.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally well supported through a rich curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Students appreciate the many opportunities they are given to take part in various clubs and visits, including educational trips both at home and abroad.
- The leadership of the headteacher, senior team and governing body is outstanding. Their shared determination to provide the best education and care for students in the school has led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching, and the raising of students' achievement and standards of behaviour.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 52 part lessons, 30 of which were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors examined students' books, talked to students about their work and heard them read. They observed other aspects of the school day including assembly, form time, students' behaviour at lunchtime and break, and students' arrival and departure from school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and other leaders, and five groups of students. In addition discussions took place with four governors including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 160 parents and carers who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire), five telephone conversations with parents, an email and five letters from parents, and 115 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A wide range of documents was reviewed including the school's own data on students' recent examination results and current progress, its self-evaluation and development plan, information about the work of the staff linked to performance management and training arrangements, monitoring of teaching, students' behaviour and attendance, the safeguarding of students, and governance.

Inspection team

Ann Behan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Glenn Mayoh	Additional Inspector
Philippa Ronan	Additional Inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional Inspector
Melvyn Blackband	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Barr Beacon School is a larger than average-sized secondary school. It converted to an academy on 1 July 2011. When its predecessor school, Barr Beacon Language College, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- While the majority of students are from White British backgrounds the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The largest group of these students is of Indian heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students supported by pupil premium, which in this school provides additional support for looked after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- About one fifth of students in Year 7 benefit from the nationally funded catch-up programme, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The school does not use any alternative off-site provision.
- The school provides support for Grace Academy, Darlaston, Willenhall E-ACT Academy, Walsall and Etone College, Nuneaton.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that work is marked and assessed accurately and that written feedback clearly shows students what they have done well, and tells them what they need to do to progress to the next level.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students enter the school with broadly average attainment. By the end of Year 11 attainment is significantly above the national average and in the top 20% compared with similar schools. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly above the national average in 2012 and 2013, this reflects outstanding progress.
- Students' achievement in mathematics is excellent. In 2012 and 2013 the proportion of students making, and exceeding expected levels of progress was significantly above national averages, and current assessments suggest that this is set to continue.
- In 2012, in English, the proportion of students making, and exceeding, expected levels of progress was significantly above the national average. In 2013, while the proportion of students making expected progress was significantly above the national average, there was a dip in the proportion exceeding expected progress. This was due to staffing instability, and to a small number of students not reaching their higher targets. Current assessment data, and work seen during the inspection, suggest that these issues have been resolved and that the proportion exceeding expected progress is the same as in 2012.
- The school makes good use of pupil premium funding to provide additional support for eligible students. They make progress similar to other students across all years, and compare favourably to similar students nationally at GCSE. In English and mathematics, in 2013 the gap between their results and other students' results had narrowed to about a half of a grade lower. Current assessments suggest that the gaps are narrowing even further.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language make outstanding progress relative to their starting points.
- Students who are eligible for catch-up support in Year 7 are given intense support to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills and as a result the gap between them and other students is narrowing rapidly.
- The attainment and progress of the most-able students are significantly above national averages in most subjects. However, in 2013 there was a dip in the proportion of most-able students gaining the higher grades in English. In lessons observed during the inspection and from current assessment data, these students are now making outstanding progress in English because of the improved stability of teaching staff and the outstanding teaching.
- Students take GCSE mathematics and English early in Year 11. This enables them to follow additional courses in other subjects and, where necessary, to gain more confidence so that they go on to achieve higher grades in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving rapidly. Students following vocational courses made outstanding progress in 2012 and 2013. However, those following academic courses gained AS and A-level results in line with national figures in 2012. Results improved considerably in 2013 reflecting good progress. Current assessment information suggests that, as a result of outstanding teaching and more rigorous tracking of students' progress, with swift and targeted intervention for students who are falling behind, the progress of the present Year 12 and 13 students is outstanding in both vocational and academic courses.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching in the vast majority of lessons and subjects is at least good and very often outstanding, including in the sixth form. Teachers have high expectations and use their excellent subject knowledge, along with detailed assessment information, to plan lessons that match the needs and abilities of all students.
- In the best lessons, students benefit from a variety of engaging and well planned activities and

the teachers use skilful questioning to check understanding and extend students' learning. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, using a variety of resources, students investigated three-dimensional shapes. The teacher encouraged and challenged their understanding by asking searching questions, combined with excellent support given to individual students by a teaching assistant. As a result, all students made excellent progress.

- Teachers are skilful at adapting tasks and activities to challenge the most-able while ensuring that other students get the support and help they need. One student said, 'The atmosphere in lessons is very good. There is a wide range of learning. We write, watch videos and role play and the teachers adjust our work so everyone understands.'
- Literacy is promoted well across the curriculum. Students are given many opportunities to practise their reading, writing and speaking skills across subjects. They are encouraged, and keen, to read out loud in many lessons. They apply extended writing skills learnt in English in many other subjects, particularly the humanities. They are encouraged to read for pleasure during form time.
- Support for disabled students, those who have special educational needs, those known to be eligible for additional government funding, and those who speak English as an additional language is consistently good and in many cases outstanding. Their progress is checked regularly and additional help is given when it is needed. The skills of teaching assistants are well targeted to help vulnerable students and as a result these students make outstanding progress.
- Students were very appreciative and positive about the quality of teaching and support that they receive. They spoke of the amount of additional time that teachers give outside of lessons to help them understand their work. One student said, 'Teachers are dedicated and will do anything to help us understand, they go over and beyond and have a passion for their subject.'
- Written feedback to students is excellent in some subjects, particularly in English and the humanities. However, it is not consistent across all subjects. Where it is less effective teachers do not always tell students what they have done well, or explain what they need to do to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding, both around the school and in lessons. Students have excellent, respectful relationships with adults and with one another. They are keen to learn and appreciate the opportunities that teachers and other adults give them. Their excellent attitudes to their work contribute significantly to the outstanding progress that they make.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students say they feel happy and safe in school. They are aware of many types of bullying, including cyber, racist and homophobic bullying. They told inspectors that bullying is rare but when it does happen, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- Students are very positive about the peer support they receive from 'champions against bullying' and the help they receive from sixth form students. They are clear about how to stay healthy, the adverse effects of alcohol and substance abuse, and how to use the internet safely.
- Sixth form students are excellent role models and contribute significantly to the smooth running of the school through their mentoring of younger students.
- Attendance is above average and the number of persistent absentees is low. This makes a key contribution to the excellent progress students make.
- Teachers manage students' behaviour well. Students were very positive about the relationships that they have with their teachers, and were clear about the sanctions and rewards that were in place. They told inspectors that lessons ran smoothly, that poor behaviour was rare and that rules were consistently and fairly applied by staff. Exclusion rates are below average and falling.
- The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to the staff questionnaire said that students were safe and well cared for, that bullying was dealt with well, and that students were well behaved.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is relentless in her pursuit for excellence and has brought about significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and the achievement and behaviour of students. She has built a team of senior and middle leaders which is very strong and effective, and which closely monitors all aspects of the work of the school.
- Staff morale is high. The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to the staff questionnaire were supportive of the headteacher and the senior leadership team. One wrote, 'I am proud to be a member of staff at Barr Beacon. Students are pleasant and hardworking and I feel supported by all members of senior staff.'
- Management of teaching and learning is rigorous and thorough. Senior leaders and curriculum and subject leaders monitor the work in their areas carefully. They target support programmes for individual, group and whole-school training to maintain outstanding teaching.
- Performance management is very rigorous and staff are set challenging targets. Underperformance is not tolerated and, although excellent support is available to help staff improve, leaders take tough action when necessary.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Senior staff and inspectors were in full agreement when judging the quality of teaching during joint observations of lessons.
- Post-16 leadership is strong and energetic and is driving the rapid improvement in the sixth form, with the result that teaching is outstanding and students' achievement has improved significantly since the academy opened.
- The school provides an excellent range of courses that are well suited to students' needs. Strong partnerships, with local primary schools, colleges of higher and further education, and local businesses, aid the progression of students at different times in their education. Students are given excellent external careers advice, and almost all students move on to education, employment or training either at the end of Year 11 or Year 13.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a rich curriculum, a well-taught personal and social education programme, assemblies and form periods and through an extensive range of enrichment activities and extra-curricular activities, including trips overseas to Spain, Italy, Germany and France.
- The school is fully committed to equal opportunities for all students, to tackling discrimination and to being fully inclusive. It uses pupil premium funding very well to provide additional teaching and support for eligible students, to enhance pastoral support for vulnerable students and to ensure that all students have full access to extra-curricular and cultural activities.
- The school works well with the local authority and provides external support for other secondary schools in the area.
- The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View or who contacted inspectors during the inspection were pleased with the work of the school.
- Arrangements for child protection and ensuring the safeguarding of students meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body makes sure that all statutory requirements are met. It is well informed and members bring a range of relevant experience to their roles. Governors analyse information about students' attainment and progress and link this closely to the quality of teaching. They use this information effectively to compare how well the school is performing against others nationally, and to ensure that different groups of students are making the best possible progress, including those eligible for additional government funding.
 - Governors are relentless in their drive to raise standards and have used performance management of staff to provide support and challenge. They ensure that pay awards are linked closely to high quality teaching and students' achievement. They are clear about their role in key issues such as child protection and keep abreast with changes nationally through appropriate training. They manage the resources of the school very well, and monitor the effectiveness and impact of their decisions, and those of the senior team to ensure best value.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136885
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	432285

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1528
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeremy Bench
Headteacher	Dame Maureen Brennan
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 January 2011
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