

Barr Beacon Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104264
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	355548
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Reporting inspector	David Anstead HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
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	1469
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeremy Bench
Headteacher	Dame Maureen Brennan
Date of previous school inspection	16 April 2008
School address	Old Hall Lane Walsall WS9 0RF
Telephone number	0121 366 6600
Fax number	0121 366 6876
Email address	postbox@barrbeacon.walsall.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Inspection number	355548

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspection team saw 48 lessons taught by 47 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, including sixth form students, the school council executive, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the college's work, and looked at students' books, analysed assessment data, checked policies and read reports about the college from the local authority. The views of 307 parents and carers, 238 students and 88 members of staff, expressed in questionnaires, were taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Achievement in English, mathematics and in the sixth form and of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- The quality of teaching and assessment, particularly in languages and mathematics
- The effectiveness of the impact of leadership and management on improving provision and the college's ability to sustain the improvements in its performance.

Information about the school

The college is well above average in size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Around one quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups, with about 12% of those being of Indian heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average. The college has held specialist status in languages for a number of years.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

At the last inspection, the college was deemed to no longer require significant improvement and was judged satisfactory. Since then the college has made a remarkable turnaround in just over two years and has transformed itself into a completely different place to learn. The college is now good and is well positioned to improve further.

The leadership team of the college has prioritised creating the right ethos and culture in which good learning can take place and a college where all students feel safe. The care, guidance and support provided to students are exemplary and their impact is seen in a number of outstanding outcomes. Behaviour is outstanding and makes an excellent contribution to improving learning. The inspectors saw no incidents of misbehaviour whatsoever during the inspection. Students say that the college is a happy community where different groups mix and get along well. They say that incidents of oppressive behaviour are rare and extremely well dealt with by the school when they do occur. The extent to which students feel safe is outstanding. Attendance is high because students enjoy and value what the college provides for them. Students have excellent spiritual, moral and social development and an excellent cultural awareness which is particularly well promoted through activities arising from the college's specialist language status.

A second priority of the leadership has been to improve the quality of teaching and learning which are now good. However, in a minority of lessons, students were presented with work of moderate challenge, the pace of learning was relaxed and teachers overly directed learning. This meant that in these lessons, students had insufficient opportunities to work independently even though their excellent attitudes to learning meant they were willing and able to do so. Consequently, achievement and the extent to which students develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being, although improved, are good rather than outstanding.

The headteacher is an inspirational figure for her students, staff and the community. She has restored the college's confidence in itself and, together with her leadership team, provided the passion, drive and ambition to bring about improvements in most areas. Virtually every aspect of the college's performance has improved since the last inspection and no aspect of its work has been judged to be less than good this time. Students and parents speak extremely highly of the college and it is heavily over-subscribed. Partnership working is outstanding. Excellent links with external services contribute to the outstanding care and support students receive and the college is providing strong and effective support to a neighbouring school which has been judged by Ofsted to require 'special measures'. The 'Future Leaders' partnership work makes an important contribution to the college's commitment to ensuring all students succeed. In 2010, every Year 11 student attained a minimum of five GCSE passes including English and mathematics. The college is successfully inclusive and ensures every student irrespective of gender, minority

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

ethnic heritage group or ability achieves in line with national expectations. As one student put it: 'Everyone matters here'. Action to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity is outstanding.

Self-evaluation and monitoring procedures are in place but they are not systematic, nor sufficiently benchmarked against national criteria to give the college a crystal clear view of its strength and weaknesses. For example, the college's evaluation of the quality of teaching relies upon monitoring the use of teaching strategies rather than upon evaluating their impact on the learning outcomes they produce. Consequently, the college's perception of strengths and weaknesses in teaching are not accurate enough to identify precisely what individual teachers need to do to improve and the quality of learning is not as good as the school believed it to be. On the other hand, the governing body has a highly developed understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses, aside from professional teaching matters, and have robustly challenged past underperformance. Governance is outstanding and has had a strong impact on the college's improvement. Considering the range and extent of improvements brought about by the college since the last inspection, it is clear that it has a good capacity to sustain its improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen self-evaluation by ensuring it is systematic and rigorously benchmarks the school's performance against a wide range of national indicators.
- Improve the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning by ensuring a consistently high level of challenge and pace in lessons and by providing more opportunities for students to work independently.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment on entry is broadly average. The school's performance data for the last three years show a strong upward trend. Attainment on all measures apart from that for mathematics was significantly above average in 2010. The college has an excellent system for standardising teacher assessments and collating and tracking these to regularly check individual students are on course to reach their targets. Tracking shows students to be making good progress and this was confirmed by inspectors' lesson observations. Progress in the school's specialist language subjects is now good. There are no noticeable differences in the progress made by different groups of students. The progress made by Year 11 students with special educational needs and/or disabilities was outstanding in 2010. However, during the inspection, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in all year groups were seen to make good rather than outstanding progress in line with the rest of the class.

Learning was good in the great majority of lessons visited during the inspection. Where learning was best, students were well engaged in a variety of tasks which were modified to provide appropriate challenge for their different starting points. Learning in these lessons proceeded at a good pace and enabled students to work collaboratively or independently at appropriate moments. Learning was limited to being satisfactory where teachers talked to the whole class for lengthy periods or over-controlled how students would learn. Students responding to questionnaires issued during the inspection were highly positive about most aspects of the college but were less enthusiastic about the

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

opportunities they have to contribute their views on how learning might take place. However, it is clear that students enjoy their learning experiences and are achieving well.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. It is good in languages and mathematics. Students behave extremely well in lessons and engage actively where the teaching gives them the opportunity to do so. Resources, including information and communication technology and additional adults, are used well to enhance students' learning. Teachers enable students to understand how well they are doing through the good use of self, peer and classroom assessment techniques. Students have a good understanding of their current levels of attainment and what they need to do to improve in striving to reach their target grades. The curriculum is broad, balanced and very well organised. The provision of a wide range of vocational courses in Key Stage 4 with effect from 2008 has contributed to the overall improvement in attainment. Key Stage 4 courses are now very closely linked to those available to students in Year 12 and this has contributed to the number staying on into the sixth form.

The Year 7 curriculum provides additional time for English and mathematics for those students who enter the school with lower levels of numeracy and literacy to support them in catching up with their peers. This provision is planned to move into Year 8 in the coming year. Tracking data are closely monitored and inform the deployment of a range of

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

additional support strategies and, for some students, an individualised curriculum. This approach, along with the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the pastoral team, has been highly effective in closing any gaps between the performances of different student groups.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The college has set itself some extremely challenging targets and there is no doubt that the staff are pulling together to try and achieve them in the short term. There is tremendous ambition and drive which has resulted in nearly every aspect of the college's performance improving by a grade or more since the last inspection. This real strength of leadership and management is tempered, however, by a tendency for self-evaluation to, at times, take an overly aspirational view of monitoring evidence rather one that is rooted in rigorously benchmarked data. The governors are aware that the college's formal self-evaluation document is out of date and of the need to more rigorously benchmark the college's performance against national indicators. The quality of governance is excellent.

Students of White British heritage are now making better progress so that the attainment gap between them and students of Indian heritage has been closed. The effectiveness of the school at promoting equality of opportunity is outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are good and exceed government expectations. The promotion of community cohesion is good and well supported by the specialist status, although the college's effectiveness in this regard is limited from being 'outstanding' by weaknesses in its evaluation.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Attainment on entry until this year has been slightly below average. AS and A level examination results have risen consistently over the last four years and the proportion of top grades in particular has grown. Variations between subjects have reduced. The percentage of students who stay on to successfully complete their courses has increased markedly over previous years and is now in line with the national average. Tracking data and a commercial system purchased by the college to help analyse student progress both show that sixth form achievement is good. Outcomes overall are good, although questionnaires completed by sixth formers indicate that they would like the college do more to help them adopt healthy lifestyles.

Students make rapid progress in a majority of lessons where the tasks are challenging, where there are opportunities for them to work independently and where they receive clear feedback on their performance. Where one or more of these elements is lacking, the quality of learning declines and this explains the variations in examination performance between subjects. The strongest element of provision is the quality of care, guidance and support. This sets high expectations for students' conduct and attendance as well as raising their aspirations for the future and encouraging them to set their sights high.

Good leadership and management of the sixth form have resulted in the improved provision. Performance data are now used well to monitor individual progress and development and to inform the nature of any additional support that might be required. Sixth formers are appreciative of this and commented that staff in the sixth form 'go the extra mile' to help them. There is a good capacity for improvement.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The views of parents and carers were more positive than is seen nationally about all but three elements of the questionnaire. This reflects the good leadership and management of the college, the outstanding care for students and the mix of good and outstanding outcomes. Parents and carers were slightly less positive about the way in which the college informs them about the progress their children are making and about the extent to which the college takes account of their suggestions and concerns. The college has identified in its own planning that it wishes to improve the effectiveness of its engagement with parents and carers. It was recently presented with the Leading Parental Partnership Award in recognition of the good progress that has already been made in this area. Inspectors graded this aspect of the college's work as good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Barr Beacon Language College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 307 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1469 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	102	33	189	62	9	3	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	124	40	174	57	9	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	99	32	171	56	25	8	5	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	111	36	171	56	18	6	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	96	31	196	64	7	2	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	64	21	198	64	24	8	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	21	208	68	26	8	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	96	31	169	55	11	4	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	28	197	64	13	4	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	121	39	158	51	18	6	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	66	21	182	59	22	7	8	3
The school is led and managed effectively	136	44	159	52	7	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	150	43	145	47	8	3	2	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Barr Beacon Language College, Walsall WS9 0RF

Thank you for your friendly welcome when we inspected your college and for the insightful discussions we had with those of you we met with.

We found that your college is good and that it is improving rapidly. Teaching and the range of courses you can study are good and consequently the progress you are making is also good. Examination results are rising and now nearly all are significantly better than the national averages in the main school and heading that way in the sixth form. The college looks after you extremely well, your behaviour is excellent and you told us that you feel safe. Your attendance is among the best in the country! The headteacher and senior staff are doing a good job of making your college even better.

I have asked the headteacher to continue to improve the college by:

- checking in detail how the college is doing in comparison with other schools
- making sure your work is always challenging and interesting
- ensuring lessons proceed at a fast pace and include opportunities when you can work on your own.

You can help by keeping up your excellent attendance record and by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

David Anstead

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.