

Banbury Academy

Ruskin Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9HY

Inspection dates

8–9 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The board was slow to act on the changes needed to bring about improvements across the school. Significant numbers of staff and some parents have lost confidence in the leadership and do not feel supported. The high turnover of staff, including at senior leadership level, has disrupted the education of some pupils and sixth-form students, and slowed the rate of school improvement.
- Leaders' efforts to improve teaching have not resulted in consistently good quality. Not all teachers manage pupils' behaviour well enough in lessons or provide work that is sufficiently engaging for all pupils.
- The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of others, although narrowing, is too wide.
- Attendance has been well below average for a few years, although it has improved this year. There are too many pupils who have persistently high rates of absenteeism.
- Many staff and some parents say that pupils' behaviour is not managed consistently well by senior leaders.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 have fallen in the past few years to well below the national average in 2015. Current pupils are not making rapid enough progress in key stage 3 in some subjects, including mathematics.
- Provision in the sixth form requires improvement. Students are not given good-quality and timely advice and guidance to prepare them for the next stage of their education or training.

The school has the following strengths

- The board is now holding leaders to account more robustly and has secured the appointment of a new principal who started in the week of the inspection.
- There is some strong and effective teaching in most subjects across the school and particularly in key stage 4 and the sixth form. English is taught well.
- Pupils' welfare is given a high priority and safeguarding is managed well. Pupils feel safe and most parents agree.
- The most able pupils are taught well in many subjects in key stage 4.
- Year 11 pupils are making accelerated progress because of the intensive extra support they are given.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress that pupils make in all subjects in key stage 3, by:
 - leaders ensuring that teachers provide work that engages and challenges pupils of all abilities to learn and to behave well
 - providing more opportunities for teachers to learn from the existing good practice within the school and across the trust.
- Strive to close the attainment gap further between disadvantaged pupils and others in school by continuing to implement and monitor the school's recently introduced strategies.
- Improve the attendance of pupils and students, especially of those whose attendance falls well below average, by robustly implementing the school's approaches introduced this year.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels share responsibility and are held to account for the consistent implementation of school policies, such as those to do with the quality of teaching and management of behaviour
 - seeking to regain the confidence of staff and parents in the leadership, as a matter of some urgency.
- Improve the provision for 16 to 19 study programmes by:
 - providing students with better careers advice and guidance, and making sure it happens earlier in their programmes
 - helping students to organise arrangements for work experience in a more timely fashion
 - improving students' attendance
 - providing more opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and for their voice to be heard.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- School leaders, including the board, did not act swiftly enough after the last inspection to respond to the falling standards and concerns over leadership. This academic year, the board and trust leaders' response has been much more robust and they have helped to introduce a range of useful policies and tighter monitoring of pupils' progress and behaviour. However, these policies have not been fully and consistently implemented across the school. Progress has also been adversely affected by the high turnover of staff, including senior leaders. A few pupils and sixth-form students commented that these frequent changes of staff have disrupted their learning and progress in some subjects.
- A significant number of staff and some parents expressed concern about the way that the school is being led and managed. Several staff said that they did not feel trusted or supported by senior leaders, for example in dealing with pupils' behaviour. They said that communication is not always very good.
- Leaders' more regular and robust monitoring of the quality of teaching has brought about improvements, but not to a consistently high standard. Strategies such as a presentation policy, whilst included in pupils' books, are not all being consistently implemented by staff or monitored by leaders. School leaders are aware of the areas for improvement and these are being tackled appropriately, but their self-evaluation is overly positive and reflective of their aspiration rather than reality.
- The school has introduced the new national curriculum appropriately into key stage 3 in all subjects. Leaders are tracking pupils' progress based on levels in most subjects. They are trialling a new approach in English based on linking outcomes to GCSE expectations.
- Leaders show a determination to bring about improvements. Many of the subject and college leaders are effective. They are enthusiastic and contribute to monitoring teaching and learning in their areas. They are aware of the need to monitor the progress of different groups, including disadvantaged pupils, for example.
- The school has begun to use its additional funds for disadvantaged pupils appropriately. Staff are fully aware of who these pupils are. The school has prepared profile cards that set out information about each disadvantaged pupil and how staff can help them to succeed. There is a wide range of approaches to close the gaps for these pupils, including additional one-to-one and small-group sessions, and coaching in several subjects. The school pays for resources for disadvantaged pupils and for them to participate in educational trips and after-school clubs. These strategies are beginning to have an impact, particularly in Years 7 to 9, where gaps are mainly closing and disadvantaged pupils are sometimes making better progress than their peers in mathematics and science. However, many of these strategies have only been introduced this academic year and are having less impact higher up the school. The attainment gaps are reducing, but, as the school leaders recognise, are still too wide.
- The school is using its government funds well to help Year 7 pupils who start with low levels of literacy and numeracy. These pupils receive three weeks of daily, intensive one-to-one or small-group sessions in mathematics or literacy, as appropriate, as well as additional support for reading and writing. These approaches have been effective in helping these pupils to make good progress in most cases. Progress in reading is particularly good.
- Pupils are offered a good range of subjects, and efforts are made to meet their individual needs. Year 11 pupils were positive about being offered a curriculum that enabled them to follow a more vocational route and to have additional lessons in English and mathematics. There is a wide variety of after-school clubs such as for art, drama, media, chess and sports, as well as a weekly drop-in clinic with the school nurse. Teachers go out of their way to help pupils' academic work in after-school catch-up lessons and homework clubs. The weekly two-hour after-school session for pupils following three sciences in key stage 4 has had a positive impact on results.
- The school promotes pupils' personal development well through a range of planned events and lessons. The school's advocacy group for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development comprises a small team of enthusiastic teachers. This group has helped to raise the profile of SMSC and introduced ideas for inclusion in the curriculum, assemblies and mentor sessions. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. They spoke clearly about British values and show tolerance towards others. They explained that racism is not tolerated by staff. Relationships among pupils are positive and supportive.

- Staff appreciate the good range of opportunities for professional development, including the advocacy groups where staff work together to find solutions to particular school priorities or areas of weakness. They have been able to attend external training, such as for special educational needs and for 'polishing pedagogy', which has helped a few teachers to improve their practice. Links with other trust schools have been developing well and involved sharing of practice and discussions about how to assess pupils' work. There has been useful whole-staff training, for example in how to best teach pupils who speak English as an additional language and how to improve pupils' writing. A Year 11 pupil spoke enthusiastically about how her writing had improved as result of the help she had received.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The local advisory board and trust have been aware of concerns about the school's leadership since the last inspection, but failed to act swiftly and decisively enough; as a result, standards declined and teaching did not improve. A revised governance structure in September 2015, which has given more responsibility to a district board, has been much more effective. Members of the district board have, through frequent visits and reviews of the school and regular updates of pupils' progress, started to hold leaders to account more robustly. Their actions have helped to bring about the recent improvements in the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress.
 - The board has encouraged the sharing of good practice across the trust and the introduction of some useful policies and practices, such as the use of the 'engage' room for internal exclusions.
 - The board has been fully engaged in the process of the recruitment of a new principal and members have high hopes for the future of the school.
 - The board fulfils its statutory duties effectively, for example in relation to safeguarding and ensuring that finances are managed well, including the use of pupil premium and catch-up funds. Board members ensure that the performance appraisal of teaching and support staff is managed well, and that progression up the pay scale is securely linked to teaching quality.
 - Board members are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including in the quality of teaching and what is being done to address weaknesses in teaching. They have high expectations and aspirations for the pupils and are determined to improve.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff have received all relevant training, including training in the Prevent duty, which they said was 'very good'. Leaders are vigilant about ensuring that safeguarding and child protection are managed well. There are good links with external agencies such as health, police and social care services.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Although there have been recent improvements in the quality of teaching across the school, there is still a small core that is not yet good. Leaders have worked hard to improve teaching, and support for struggling teachers has been effective in some cases. The high turnover of staff and difficulty in recruiting teachers in some subjects have had a negative impact on improving teaching overall. 'It is like three steps forward, two steps back,' as one teacher put it.
- A few teachers, particularly with middle and lower ability groups in key stage 3, fail to engage pupils sufficiently or to manage their behaviour; as a result, pupils make little progress.
- Teachers are not always catering well enough for the wide range of abilities in some key stage 3 classes, particularly in Year 8, even where the pupils are taught in ability sets. In these classes, all pupils are too often given the same work, which is sometimes easy for some pupils and too difficult for others.
- Teaching is typically better in key stage 4 and the sixth form than in key stage 3. Teaching is also generally more effective in higher ability sets. In these classes, teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well; they are alert and motivated.
- The most able pupils are often taught well in key stage 4 where they are given work that really stretches them to think. For example, pupils in a Year 10 science class were experimenting with titration and applying knowledge and skills more typically found in A-level work.
- The majority of teachers have secure subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic about their subjects and try to make learning fun. The best teaching is well planned and draws effectively on previous learning. The teachers engage pupils through skilful questioning and they provide them with clear feedback that helps pupils to improve, as seen, for example, in Year 7 art. Relationships are supportive and enable pupils to be prepared to take risks, as seen in Year 8 music.

- Teaching in science and English is good, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Some students described science teaching as 'amazing'. Science includes a good amount of practical work for pupils. Mathematics teaching is better in key stage 4 than in key stage 3, and this is reflected in the better progress that pupils are making in key stage 4.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel that staff have their best interests at heart and they know whom to turn to if they have a concern. They say that they feel safe in school and they are taught how to keep safe, for example, from internet bullying and extremism. They show respect for others and tolerance towards different faiths and cultures. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire agreed that their children feel safe in the school.
- Pupils are helped to develop self-confidence and leadership skills through, for example, being 'aspirations ambassadors' who guide visitors around the school and support new pupils. Most pupils spoke clearly and confidently to inspectors.
- Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are prepared well for the next stage of their education. They receive timely and effective advice about careers. Mentor time is mostly used well to provide pupils with information about current issues, such as Ramadan, and to learn about keeping safe.
- The school looks after the needs of pupils with special educational needs or disability carefully and their progress is tracked well. Good links have been made with external agencies, as necessary, to support these pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' learning is sometimes undermined by the poor behaviour of a few pupils in some lessons. The school has worked hard to improve behaviour, but it is still not good enough; this was a concern expressed by some pupils and parents. Several staff commented that senior leaders do not provide consistent support to help them cope with the challenging behaviour of a few pupils.
- Most pupils have a positive attitude towards learning and respond well to teachers' instructions. However, a significant number do not take enough care over the presentation of work and handwriting in their books, despite the leaders' insistence on this.
- Pupils' attendance is well below the national average. There is also a significant number of pupils who are persistently absent; a high proportion are disadvantaged.
- The school has been more vigilant this year about addressing poor attendance. Mentors are now involved in following up absences using the weekly attendance data they are given for their tutor groups. There has been good cooperation with the local authority to issue warning and penalty notices to parents of persistent low attenders. School leaders have worked closely with families to help them understand the link between attendance and attainment and with child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to address barriers to school attendance. As a result of these initiatives, attendance has started to improve this year.
- External exclusions have been high, but reduced this year through a new effective arrangement that includes the creation of an internal exclusion 'engage' room.
- Most pupils behave sensibly and politely around the school. They respect the attractive and well-maintained school grounds and there is little litter and no evidence of graffiti. Pupils and students are smartly dressed, though some still need, but respond promptly to, reminders to 'tuck their shirt in'.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Standards have declined since the last inspection in terms of the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSEs with grades A* to C, including in English and mathematics; year-on-year comparisons are, though, difficult because of changes in examination requirements. The proportion fell well below average in 2015. In addition, the value added by the school for pupils in Year 11 last year was well below average in many subjects.
- Current pupils are not all making enough progress in some subjects, including mathematics, in key stage 3. Progress in some other subjects is good, for example in science and English. In key stage 4, pupils are making more rapid progress due to the range of extra support and interventions that the school has organised for them.
- The attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils have lagged behind those of others in the school and nationally, with year-on-year gaps not closing consistently. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was better in English than in mathematics last year. The attainment gaps, for example in terms of the proportions attaining A* to C in English and mathematics, have been stubbornly high. As a result of the school's interventions described above, the attainment and progress gaps are closing, particularly in key stage 3. The gap at the end of key stage 4 in terms of the proportion of pupils attaining five A* to C grades including in English and mathematics has been reducing, albeit slowly in the past few years. In the sixth form, disadvantaged students have performed as well as or better than their peers in examinations.
- The school's results for the end of Year 11 in English have been consistently close to or above the national average, with a particularly good outcome in English literature last year. The proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress from Year 6 were in line with the national average from most starting points last year.
- Mathematics and science results were less positive in 2015, compared with English. School information and work seen in books indicate improved performance this year, with pupils on track to attain better results in these subjects. Overall, the school predictions are for the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSEs with grades A* to C, including in English and mathematics, to rise to 53% (from 43% in 2015). The reliability of the predictions has been enhanced by a good level of in-school and inter-school moderation of teachers' assessments.
- The proportion of pupils attaining passes in the Ebacc subjects (English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities) rose to reach the national average of just under a quarter in 2015. This was a significant achievement considering that the attainment on entry for this group of Year 11 pupils was well below average.
- The most able pupils often make good progress and attain well. For example, last year the proportion of pupils that gained the top grades, A and A*, was close to the national averages in several subjects, including English, science, history, Spanish, drama, and art and design.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make good progress. They spoke very positively about the help they receive, for example, in English and mathematics. They know how well they are doing and how to improve. The school has improved its provision and expertise in supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language. They are making good progress in most cases.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Provision for the 16 to 19 study programmes is not as good as it was when the school was inspected in 2014. Examination results fell last year. Students are not provided with high-quality and timely careers advice and guidance. Students are expected to organise their own work experience and feel that this has been left very late. Some sixth-form students said that they do not feel listened to and that they are given few opportunities to develop their own leadership skills. A few students commented on how the turnover of teachers had impacted negatively on their learning and progress in some subjects. Attendance has been low.
- The new leader of the sixth form has begun to address some of these weaknesses. He has successfully raised expectations of students' behaviour and appearance with a new dress code. Safeguarding is managed effectively. Students are articulate and very keen to do well. They are respectful of each other and of adults. Teachers are tracking students' progress appropriately. Most students know what their predicted grades are and how to achieve them. They appreciate the impact reports they receive that help them to know how to improve. They have regular meetings with their mentors to discuss their progress.

- Attainment and progress in external examinations fell last year in many subjects. English results were good. Predictions for this year indicate better outcomes due to improvements in the quality of teaching in many academic and vocational subjects. Retention has been just below the national average in academic subjects, but close to average in vocational courses.
- Programmes of study are planned and managed well to meet the needs of each student. Changes have been made to the subjects offered, in order to better meet students' needs. For example, new examination courses have been introduced in sport, forensic science and applied information technology, in order to suit more vocational students. More stringent entry requirements have also been applied, where leaders recognised that some students were struggling to meet the demands of advanced-level courses.
- Provision for students who have not attained a grade C in English and/or mathematics have improved this year, with most achieving a pass grade when they re-sat the examination.
- Teaching and learning have improved in the sixth form, with some effective teaching seen in several subjects, including English, mathematics and geography. In the best teaching, teachers plan activities carefully, based on their accurate assessments of students' understanding and progress. They are challenging students well. Students spoke positively about the help that they are given in several subjects and how these teachers 'really cared' about them and helped them to make good progress.

School details

Unique reference number	138499
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10012330

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	797
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body (local advisory board)
Chair	Tony Ingham
Principal	Emily Gent
Telephone number	01295 251451
Website	www.aatbanbury.org
Email address	office@aatbanbury.org
Date of previous inspection	17–18 June 2014

Information about this school

- Banbury Academy is an average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form. The academy is sponsored by the Aspirations Academy Trust and shares a site with the trust's studio school, Space Studio Banbury, which opened in September 2014. Around 35 pupils left Banbury Academy at the end of Year 9 in the last two years to attend the studio school, which specialises in science and mathematics.
- No pupils are currently attending any alternative provision.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is around the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with small numbers from a range of different ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average, though this number is increasing. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of English language acquisition.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The published data on the progress of Year 11 pupils in 2015 was based on the teachers' assessments when they were in Year 6 for nearly 50% of the pupils, rather than national tests.

- There has been a high turnover of staff since the last inspection, including at leadership level. The current principal was on sick leave and not present during the inspection. A newly appointed principal was due to take over the day after the inspection ended.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across most year groups and in most subjects. Many observations were undertaken with senior leaders.
- It was not possible to observe teaching in Year 13 as students were on study leave at the time of the inspection. Year 11 and 12 pupils were also involved in examinations, but inspectors managed to observe some lessons in these year groups.
- Inspectors observed mentor sessions and some after-school clubs.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work during lesson observations and separately. They listened to pupils reading in class and in a meeting where they talked to them about their reading habits.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the district board, the local advisory board, members of the trust's central management team, the acting principal, other senior leaders, teachers with responsibilities for subjects, and a group of teachers.
- Informal discussions took place with pupils and students during break- and lunchtimes and in five more formal meetings.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including: the school's own evaluation of how well it is doing; its improvement plans; statistical information about pupils' and sixth-form students' progress and attainment, attendance and exclusions; board meeting minutes; and policies, case studies and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- Inspectors met three parents and considered the 20 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey and the views expressed in 13 comments and a telephone message. They also considered the 70 online responses to the staff questionnaire. The views expressed in response to the school's own surveys completed by parents were also taken into account.

Inspection team

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