



The Business Academy Bexley

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 133769
LEA Not Applicable
Inspection number 283099
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Brenda Cusdin HMI

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

Type of school	Academy	School address	Yarnton Way
School category	Non-maintained		Erith
Age range of pupils	4 to 19		DA18 4DW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8320 4800
Number on roll	1396	Fax number	020 8311 9546
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr T Garnham
Date of previous inspection	23 November 2005	Headteacher	Mr R Burton

Age group 4 to 19	Inspection dates 23 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	Inspection number 283099
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Business Academy Bexley is a new and technologically advanced school in the London Borough of Bexley. The academy opened in September 2002, moving to new accommodation in September 2003. The academy expanded rapidly in its first three years. Now in its fourth year, it is one of very few state schools to offer education for pupils aged from 4 to 19 years. The academy is much larger than most other schools: there are 376 pupils in the primary section and 1020 pupils in the secondary section, including 91 in the sixth form. The academy serves the most socially disadvantaged area in the borough. More pupils than usual are entitled to free school meals (almost a half in the primary section and over a third in the secondary section). Over two thirds of the pupils are white British. There is a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds in the pupil community: the largest minority ethnic group is black African. Roughly one in every eight pupils has a mother tongue other than English and currently 25 pupils are in the earliest stages of learning English as an additional language. The academy has a special unit for primary pupils with severe language and communication difficulties. The proportion of pupils in the academy with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those holding a Statement of Special Educational Need, is far higher than usual. Standards on entry to the secondary section have been rising. However, the average skills level of pupils entering the Foundation Stage and Year 7 are much lower than found nationally. Recruitment and retention of staff has been difficult. There is a high turnover of teaching staff and a large number of the teachers are relatively inexperienced. There have been changes at the top tier of leadership. Most of the senior leaders have been in their posts for a maximum of two terms and some only started at the beginning of this term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The leadership of the academy has faced extremely challenging circumstances. In its first year, the academy admitted pupils aged 11 to 16 years from a predecessor school but stayed in the former school buildings. In its second year, the academy moved into its innovative accommodation and introduced sixth form courses. In its third year, the academy admitted pupils aged 4 to 11 years from two predecessor primary schools and from two attached special units: one catered for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and the other for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. All three predecessor schools had been in a category of concern within their final three years. In its fourth year of operation, the first when there is no expansion in the age range of the pupils, there are still twenty new teachers to induct into the academy's ways of working. The academy has invested considerable time into supporting inexperienced teachers or those trained in other countries: the benefits of this investment are sometimes lost as teachers move elsewhere. The challenges in managing this rapid expansion are considerable; for example confirming the nature and detail of the curriculum, settling in new staff and pupils of different ages at different times, organising the ground-breaking accommodation and getting business systems to run efficiently. Moreover there has been a relentless interest from the media in these new flagship schools. The senior leadership has risen to these challenges well and the day-to-day organisation runs smoothly. Pupils are very positive about the academy: they believe it is improving and are keen to make a greater contribution, welcoming the recently introduced house and prefect system in the secondary section. Achievement in Years 9 and 11 has improved substantially. Pupils have achieved really well in Year 11 GCSE examinations given their starting points at the beginning of Year 10. Primary pupils are making satisfactory progress this year. The pupils in the Foundation Stage are making a sound start, developing appropriate skills in the required areas of learning. The senior leaders and governors have demonstrated that they have the capacity to deliver improvements. In a matter of months, the new primary principal has shown incisive leadership and achieved significant improvements in the quality of teaching, demonstrating a good capacity to improve in the primary section. There have been well-reasoned improvements in the secondary section this year; for example in tightening up the scheduling of lessons and improving the management structure. The senior leaders' evaluation of the academy's performance was confirmed by inspectors. However, there are weaknesses which senior leaders have recognised but have not tackled speedily enough. The sixth form provision is inadequate and success rates in Year 13 examinations in 2005 were poor. The amount of unsatisfactory teaching in the secondary section is too high and this is generating too many instances of unsatisfactory behaviour in lessons. The monitoring of teaching in the secondary section is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that speedy, and effective, remedial action is taken to reduce the amount of unsatisfactory teaching. These weaknesses mean that value for money is not fully satisfactory. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school, including the sixth form, requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. Significant

improvement is required in relation to the quality of teaching and learning in the secondary section and the effectiveness of provision in the sixth form.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The sixth form provision is inadequate and value for money is unsatisfactory for this age range. There is a lack of strategic leadership in this area and the sixth form development plan is weak. The academy rightly sets out to encourage pupils to stay on into the sixth form, hoping to raise their sights and increase the numbers continuing in education post-16. However, the courses provided in the sixth form were not tailored to the pupils' starting points and results were poor. Wisely, the staff have ensured that pupils' prior attainment is more closely matched to the courses on offer this year but the curriculum is not designed well enough to ensure that all pupils' needs are met. As yet, the tracking of pupils' progress is not sufficiently developed to ensure that they gain the qualifications they want.

What the school should do to improve further

* Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the secondary section.* Improve the effectiveness of the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

Standards are significantly below average in Years 2 and 6. The pupils in the primary section are making satisfactory progress this year, including those who have learning difficulties and disabilities. There is an appropriate focus on developing writing skills following a productive analysis of a range of tests which assess the pupils' basic skills. The pupils in the Foundation Stage are satisfactorily developing social, language and mathematical skills. Achievement has improved considerably in Years 9 and 11. In the 2005 GCSE examinations, the target for five or more overall passes was reached and virtually every pupil achieved at least one pass. Some ambitious targets were not met at Years 9 and 11 in 2005 and standards remain significantly below national averages. However, the pupils who took tests and examinations in 2004 and 2005 made at least satisfactory progress from their starting points in Year 7. Indeed the Year 11 pupils did really well, bearing in mind their Year 9 results. There was considerable variation in the results achieved in different GCSE subjects in 2005. Encouragingly, results were relatively strong in English, mathematics and science: disappointingly they were weaker in business studies and information and communications technology (ICT), areas where the academy wants to innovate but where there have been staffing difficulties. The staff have identified the achievement of white British boys as weaker than that of other groups and are taking steps to address the problem, for instance by introducing single sex English classes in Key Stage 4. Progress in lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 was closely related to the quality of teaching. Pupils learning English as an additional

language, and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, made satisfactory progress in the effective lessons. Most pupils in Years 9 and 11 were able to identify their individual targets but were not always clear about how they would reach them. Sixth form results were poor in 2005. Success rates were well below those seen nationally as shown by the following two examples. Out of 20 pupils taking the International Baccalaureate (IB) only four passed all six subjects and only two achieved a full diploma. Out of six pupils taking an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in business only one achieved a grade E and four did not pass any units. The senior leaders recognise that many of the sixth form pupils were unsuited to the high academic requirements in their courses. The academy has now raised the entry requirements for such courses. In the small sample of sixth form lessons observed by inspectors, pupils were coping reasonably well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

In the primary section, the pupils' personal and social development is good, and their moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Events such as 'anti-bullying week' help the pupils think about issues that are important to them and how to deal with worrying situations. The pupils enjoy their lessons, attend regularly and respond with enthusiasm to good teaching. They usually concentrate well and persevere with what they are doing, although some require a good degree of support to do so. The pupils play together energetically and safely at break times, supported by a skilled team of play leaders. The pupils feel safe and know that the staff will look after them. Many make healthy choices from the appetising menu at lunchtimes. School council members understand the important part they have to play in representing the views of their classmates, and spoke proudly of the activities they had completed to raise money for charities. This, together with the growing emphasis on basic skills, is helping to prepare the pupils for the next phase of their education and the wider world. In the secondary section, the pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Many pupils clearly value what the academy offers. They respond keenly to the opportunities to take responsibility within the house system and student council. They believe that they "have a voice" and are fully behind changes which they say have improved things greatly since the academy opened. Pupils feel safe and secure, and know that they can turn to staff for advice and support. They know about healthy life styles and are pleased with the improvements in catering. They get reasonable opportunities to explore workplace issues and engage in enterprise related activities. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. A minority of pupils, however, do not behave well or show respect for each other or their teacher when they know that they can get away with it. This spoils these lessons for those who want to learn. When lessons are taught well, the same pupils behave well. Movement around the site is generally orderly but the behaviour of a few pupils tends to deteriorate as the day progresses. Attendance is satisfactory overall but is well below average in Year 11. Sensibly, individual learning programmes have been negotiated to encourage the most reluctant learners to attend regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are inadequate overall. They are at least satisfactory in the primary section. There are, however, weaknesses in the teaching in the secondary phase and not enough of it is good. The academy's monitoring of teaching in the secondary section this year revealed that the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was roughly one lesson in six. In-house coaching has been provided for those identified as needing support. In some cases this has worked well but in others practice remains inadequate. In the best lessons across the age range, teachers employed a broad range of learning styles, making effective use of ICT resources. They encouraged pupils to develop their ideas and understanding through effective questioning and structured discussion, and the pupils made good progress. When ideas were presented with enthusiasm, the pupils relished learning. In these effective lessons, and in the reasonably effective lessons, assessment information was used to ensure that activities and resources were fairly well matched to the pupils' language needs and learning difficulties. In the ineffective lessons, teachers were too tolerant of poor punctuality, laid-back attitudes to study and to perpetual chatter at times when listening was required. Too little was expected of the learners in terms of their effort as well as their behaviour. The planning did not take account of the needs of the higher and lowest attaining pupils. These weaknesses held back learning significantly. In many instances, teaching assistants helped pupils with learning difficulties to settle and successfully complete their tasks. However, in a few lessons they had less impact as they did little more than listen to the teacher.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is much better this year and gives these youngest pupils appropriate experiences for their age. The primary curriculum is suitably broad and incorporates a good range of visits and events. Proper attention is given to developing the pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy, helped by a review of teaching programmes initiated by the new primary principal. There are good features in the curriculum for this age range, such as residential trips for older pupils, a recent project on ethical trading and specialist teaching in science and art. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory. The younger pupils study a suitable core of subjects, including business studies and citizenship, which is usefully complemented by special event days. For good reasons, separate lessons on language and thinking skills have been introduced this year. The related schemes of work, however, are at an early stage of development and the objectives of these courses have not been defined in sufficient detail. A reasonable blend of academic and vocational courses is available to pupils at

Key Stage 4. Sensibly, the academy intends to widen this provision to provide a more attractive, alternative curriculum for disaffected and low-attaining pupils. The sixth form curriculum is inadequate because it does not meet all the pupils' needs. Examination courses cater mainly for higher and average attaining pupils. There is too little on offer for pupils who gain low GCSE grades at the end of Year 11 and who want to stay on. A firmer steer this year has ensured that pupils are choosing more suitable options. Usefully, many of the sixth form courses build appropriately on courses at Key Stage 4. The programme for some pupils, however, does not occupy enough of their time nor does it provide them with the broader experiences normally expected in sixth forms. Across the age range, greater emphasis is being given to business and enterprise. Appropriate actions are being taken to overcome the unreliability of the ICT hardware that has hampered the teaching of ICT. Arrangements for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are in transition and are satisfactory. The remit for the primary special unit has been clarified and pupils are integrated appropriately into mainstream classes. The staff recognise that different approaches are required with particular groups of pupils, for example the lowest attaining group in Year 7. Rightly the academy is keen to ensure that improvements in this area of its work continue.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory, with some good practice. Helpfully, student and family services staff work across both sections. They fully involve parents and outside agencies in their commitment to establishing children's needs and circumstances, and setting out the steps that should be taken to help pupils manage their difficulties better and to safeguard them. Procedures for child protection are known and understood. There are good procedures in place to deal with any incidents of bullying or racial harassment. Usefully, initiatives to support pupils with particularly challenging behaviour are underway but these strategies have not yet been evaluated. A recent 'Family Learning Week' sowed the seeds of better communication between staff and parents. Parents' views of the academy are overwhelmingly positive. A few parents want more regular information about their child's work and a few hoped that the academy would consult them more. Parents of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are consulted about the arrangements for supporting their child. The academy's management systems which use ICT have proved problematic. There is an extensive range of information about how well pupils are learning that is not easily accessible to staff. This has unhelpfully limited the academy's ability to pick up problem areas or underperforming groups in time to turn the situation around. Moreover, staff have not been able to point to hard evidence that additional support provided, for instance for pupils with learning difficulties, has led to significant gains. The tracking of pupils' progress has improved in the primary section. The secondary review days have ensured that pupils know their targets and have discussed ideas that might help them to achieve better. The recently appointed head of sixth form has very effective relationships with the sixth form pupils who appreciate the good quality personal

support that he provides. However, targets are set too long after the start of their courses and the tracking of their progress is not good enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

There is a strong team spirit amongst senior and middle managers, which runs across the primary and secondary sections. All speak highly of the greater clarity in the management structure. The staff know who they can turn to if they need help and are much clearer about the contributions expected from them. Useful links are developing across the age range, for example in ensuring the pupils' welfare and in easing the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. The acting executive principal and the secondary principal have identified the major strengths and weaknesses within the secondary section and have initiated sensible steps to deal with most of the weaknesses. Indeed, they have boldly updated some of the initial approaches that did not work well enough; for example scheduling shorter lessons to improve pace in learning and behaviour. Their programme of induction for inexperienced teachers last year has proved successful in many cases. Their decision to introduce a house system and prefect system is very popular with the pupils. The new primary principal focused rapidly on the right areas to tackle. He has capitalised productively on skills of particular primary staff, for example in the in-house coaching programme. Moreover, he has set out a clear improvement plan for all with leadership responsibilities in the primary section. The governors have supported the academy very well. They clearly check whether planned improvements are realised. They are not afraid to hold senior leaders to account, rightly keen to know whether pupils are achieving well enough. The governors worked tirelessly to achieve the innovative accommodation, which adds a stimulating dimension to the pupils' experiences. The director of finance adds professional financial skills to the senior team. Information from national tests and examinations is carefully examined and used thoughtfully. The degree of challenge in whole-academy performance targets is clearly understood. The whole-academy development plan has appropriate priorities. The review of last year's development plan shows that a number of important elements were partially completed. Staffing difficulties and continuing problems with ICT systems were mainly to blame. There are elements of leadership skills that are not as effective as they should be. The monitoring of teaching in the secondary section has lacked rigour. The management of behaviour in the secondary section does not always ensure that pupils behave well enough, quickly enough. The demands in managing a rapid improvement in the sixth form were underestimated. The continuing weaknesses in the ICT management systems mean that senior leaders in the secondary section are not in a good position to track pupils' progress towards the targets set for them and take steps quickly if their progress is not as expected. All are aware that the ICT situation is unsatisfactory. The academy has really pushed hard to sort out this problem and is hopeful that the long-awaited improvements are close. The senior leaders have faced massive management challenges. It is greatly to their credit that the staff and

pupils of all ages speak so positively about the opportunities that the academy offers them. They obviously feel part of something new, exciting and worthwhile.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	4
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	4	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	4

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Pupils

Thank you for welcoming us to your academy. We really enjoyed joining in your lessons and talking with you about your experiences.

So much has happened already! Very few schools have pupils with such a wide age range and few have such exciting accommodation. Your academy is still quite new. Those of you in Years 7 to 10 joined the academy at the beginning of your secondary schooling: test and examination results show that pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 have achieved well. Primary pupils joined last year and you are learning quite well now. You told us that you like the new house system in the secondary section and the school council which operates in the primary and secondary sections. They give you a chance to “have your say” and feel that you really belong. Many of you are enjoying your time at the academy and are proud of it.

There are some things that are not right yet. The sixth form courses don't suit everyone and results were poor last summer. Some lessons in the secondary section don't work well enough and in these lessons some of you do not behave properly. Your principals, staff and governors have been working very hard to make your academy a good place to learn and grow up. They want you to succeed and they have promised to make improvements as quickly as they can. We hope that they do and that you will also help to make the academy get better and better.

Very best wishes from all of us

Brenda Cusdin

HM Inspector