



# Barr Beacon Language College

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 104264  
**Local Authority** Walsall  
**Inspection number** 286895  
**Inspection dates** 20–21 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Cathy Morgan HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Old Hall Lane
<b>School category</b>	Foundation		Aldridge
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Walsall WS9 0RF
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 3666600
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1201	<b>Fax number</b>	0121 3666876
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	186		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Keith Anderson
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Ray Wilson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 November 2002		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	20–21 February 2007	286895

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Barr Beacon is a large and oversubscribed school. It has specialist status as a language college. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is much lower than average. There are more boys than girls in all years except Year 11.

The school has been through a significantly turbulent time since the departure of the headteacher who was in post at the time of the last inspection. There have been seven headteachers since 2004. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2006 on an interim basis until the school's new substantive headteacher starts in April 2007. The senior leadership team also includes another interim appointment and a part-time secondee.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

Inspectors do not agree with the school's judgement that it is effective. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to leadership and management and the quality of curriculum in the school and in the sixth form.

The school is providing an acceptable standard of education for students and the sixth form provision is also satisfactory. However, the overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate and has declined since the time of the last inspection. This is because of the inconsistent and turbulent leadership of the school and the unsatisfactory role of governors in holding the school to account. Leadership and management are inadequate. The instability caused by the constant changes in leadership can be linked directly to the decision by governors to make senior posts redundant. This seriously weakened the leadership team and reduced their capacity to provide effective strategic leadership and efficient management of the school. It is to the credit of the school staff that the impact of this has been minimised to prevent students from receiving an inadequate education.

Students reach standards in Key Stage 3 tests that exceed the national average but their progress by the end of Year 11 is just satisfactory. The achievement of and standards reached by students at the school should be better than satisfactory. The current leadership team recognise that standards of attainment and the rates of progress of students need to improve. The team has effectively prioritised those areas for development which will bring about the earliest signs of improvement. Recent appointments have been aimed at ensuring that the school is better able to provide accurate financial accounts and make informed decisions about the allocation of its budget. The school has recently introduced other systems and structures designed to effect improvement but it is too soon for these to have significantly influenced the satisfactory quality of teaching or learning or raised students' achievement. The staffing difficulties, including long-term absence and failure to recruit to substantive posts, are affecting the quality of provision for students. Parents have continually expressed their concerns about the decline in student behaviour and the effect on the personal development of their children. Although students' personal development is satisfactory, parents believe that they have not been sufficiently informed about the changes in the school and there has been too little consultation with them or their children.

Although students make satisfactory progress, their learning is restricted by an inadequate curriculum which is failing to meet their needs and aspirations. The range of options on offer at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is too limited, and the lack of a wide range of enrichment opportunities makes the all-round experience for students inadequate. Students' attendance is generally satisfactory but levels of unauthorised absence are too high and demonstrate the dissatisfaction of too many students with the quality of their school experience.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students, particularly those who are vulnerable, value the range of staff to whom they can turn to if they need advice. The new system of support and guidance is beginning to demonstrate more effective tracking of their academic and pastoral development. Those who wish to pursue an academic route in their education are well prepared for the next stage. The lack of vocational and work-related options and the limited opportunities to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills leave them inadequately prepared for the world of employment.

Students' verbal communication skills are well developed. They are generally confident young citizens who enjoy being involved in activities such as charity events and they make a good contribution to the wider community. The language specialism of the school has little or no impact on their experience, however. Achievement in modern foreign languages in Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory.

Despite evidence that the present extended leadership team is demonstrating improvements, inspectors do not agree with the school's judgement that it has the capacity to improve. Inadequate governance and the forthcoming departure of those employed on an interim and seconded basis means that the leadership of the school remains extremely vulnerable.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The school welcomes students from a broad range of abilities but attracts few from other schools. The proportion of students remaining in the sixth form is in decline. Attainment on entry compared with other sixth forms is below average. However, all groups of students make satisfactory progress. The sixth form is successfully raising students' aspirations and a high proportion progress into further or higher education each year.

The retention rate and attendance of students are good and they feel well supported. Systems for monitoring the progress of students are robust and mentoring is effective. However, the school does not offer sufficient opportunities for students to progress on to vocational courses in the sixth form. There are plans for collaboration with other providers to facilitate this but these are at an early stage. Teaching accommodation in the sixth form has improved since the time of the last inspection but students still have insufficient access to ICT and other resources.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Provide stability in and improve the effectiveness of the school leadership.
- Ensure that governors have the capacity to hold the school to account.
- Ensure that the curriculum in the school and in the sixth form meets the needs and interests of all learners.
- Improve the communication with and involvement of parents and students.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students enter the school with attainment that is close to the national average and they make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11. The standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 are high and are improving in mathematics and science. However, the proportion of students attaining level 5 or above in English declined in 2006. GCSE achievement has been in decline since the time of the last inspection. Although the proportion of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades improved to 55% in 2006, this remains below the national average and the targets set by the school and the local authority. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress as a result of the good support they receive.

The specialist status of the school is having little impact on standards, particularly in modern foreign languages. A high proportion of students study French at GCSE but results are well below those attained nationally. Systems for targeting underachievement are not sufficiently rigorous and evidenced by too few students achieving the higher grades in tests and examinations. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress but there is significant variation in attainment between different subjects, and the proportion of students who gain high grades is low.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development is satisfactory. There are good opportunities for students to make a positive contribution to the community through extensive charity work and involvement with local primary schools. Students' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory and work in citizenship extends their cultural understanding. Students in the sixth form enjoy their education, gain in confidence and make positive contributions to school and community life.

Attendance is satisfactory, but not all students enjoy school and this is evident in the high proportion of unauthorised absence. The review of the behaviour policy and the introduction of the 'success centre', which provides support for vulnerable pupils, have contributed to a recent improvement in attendance and a reduction in the proportion of fixed-term exclusions. Students feel safe. They are generally well behaved around the school and in lessons. Some told inspectors that they would learn better if there was less misbehaviour by a minority of their peers.

Students are starting to adopt healthy lifestyles by choosing healthy foods at lunchtime and participating in sporting activities. They follow safe practices in practical lessons. There are too few occasions where students can exercise independent learning and a lack of opportunity for them to undertake additional responsibilities. The sixth form

council is very active but the school council has been inoperative recently and students lack a formal mechanism for voicing their point of view. Older students have experienced the world of work but not all have fully developed the capability in the use of ICT to enable them to do well in working life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

There is much variation in the quality of teaching and learning across the school but overall it is satisfactory. In the most successful lessons, teachers demonstrate expertise in their subject and plan their lessons effectively to provide a variety of suitably challenging activities for students. In these lessons, students make good progress and are well motivated and engaged. Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons to students with specific learning difficulties.

On a few occasions, students fail to make the progress that could be expected of them. Ineffective classroom management, insufficient challenge and tasks not matched sufficiently to the needs and prior attainment of different students characterise these lessons. Not all lessons stimulate students or encourage them to think independently. There is insufficient access to ICT resources for teachers and, as a result, little use of ICT to enhance students' learning.

Specialist teachers are deployed well in the sixth form. This has led to improvements, particularly in A-level science, which was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Sixth form students are encouraged to work independently and they respond well to this.

Although most students are aware of their targets, teachers do not always set appropriate homework or inform students of exactly what they need to do to improve their work. This prevents them from making more rapid progress in their learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 4**

**Grade for sixth form: 4**

Whilst students are able to study a range of subjects, the rigid and restrictive design of the timetable limits their opportunities to follow a broad and balanced curriculum. The school is failing to provide students with their statutory entitlement to ICT at Key Stage 4 and the cross curricular delivery of citizenship is ineffective. Students are unable to study drama until Year 9. This impacts negatively on their ability to engage in activities such as role-play and reduces opportunities for them to be creative.

Key Stage 4 and sixth form students have insufficient access to alternative vocational and work-related courses. The school does not provide a suitable range of individual

pathways for students and has been slow to develop effective partnerships with other schools and colleges to facilitate this. The school's specialist language college status is having little impact on the curriculum and is failing to enhance the experiences and achievement of students.

Students can participate in a wide range of sporting activities but there are few alternative activities available to them at lunchtimes and after school. Opportunities to be involved in trips and visits abroad, however, are wide and various.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Whilst there are a number of good features in the care, guidance and support provided to sixth form students, the school's provision overall is satisfactory. Health and safety arrangements are satisfactory although risk assessments are not always properly documented, nor do the governors exercise proper oversight in this area. Vulnerable students are supported well and child protection procedures are secure. A range of skilled staff, including internal welfare officers and a counsellor, is well deployed. There is good provision for students with learning difficulties or disabilities but support for those who are gifted and talented is much less effective. The good links with local primary schools ensure that students settle quickly when they first arrive. Sixth form students receive helpful guidance that prepares them well for progression into higher education.

The introduction of key stage managers and further development of the role of form tutors is leading to more effective academic guidance and pastoral support for students. Nevertheless, teachers do not always provide meaningful targets to help students improve. Many parents are dissatisfied with the frequency of communication from the school about their child's progress and the lack of opportunity for them to express their views more formally.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 4**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Staff and students have been required to undertake a range of new initiatives under the guidance of new school leaders which were agreed by governors without sufficient assurance of their success. For example, the 'behaviour for learning' programme was implemented without sufficient consultation between the school, its staff and parents. The programme was badly managed and resulted in deterioration in student behaviour and in the quality of support and guidance provided to students. Despite recognising the decline in the quality of provision, the governing body has been ineffective in holding the school to account and challenging aspects of underperformance. The school does not sufficiently canvass the views of students and parents about how it should improve.

The main issues identified at the time of the last inspection have not been successfully tackled. The quality of science provision has improved, although more able students still do not make sufficient progress in this subject. The quality of ICT provision remains unsatisfactory and still insufficient use is made of data to inform planning and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Other aspects which were judged as good at the time of the last inspection are now judged to be satisfactory or inadequate.

The present interim headteacher has worked tirelessly to reverse the current decline in the quality of education for students. The review of all aspects of the school has resulted in a clear and more accurate identification of its strengths and areas for development. Middle management is improving as a result of the newly extended leadership team but there is variability in the effectiveness of subject leadership. The school is aware of the need to strengthen this team and is in the process of reorganising the management structure to better meet the needs of the school. The procedures for performance management and the monitoring of the quality of teaching by senior and middle managers are not clearly defined nor consistently applied. Recent training for subject leaders has increased their awareness of, and confidence in undertaking lesson observations and the use of data analysis but this has not yet affected pupils' learning. There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of those lessons being covered as a result of vacant teaching posts and staff absence.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

### The quality of provision

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

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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking to you, watching you working with your teachers and speaking to them about your progress. We took your views very seriously and wanted to let you know about our findings. You may have heard that, at the end of our visit, we decided that your school needed to improve certain things in order to make it more successful. We have told your headteacher and the governors that they must make improvements to the school so that you make faster progress and achieve higher standards. We have asked your school to:

- strengthen and bring more stability to the leadership team so that improvements can be made to your school in a short time
- ensure that governors are better able to identify and manage improvements to the school
- introduce more courses to give older students better choices
- improve the communication with and involvement of you and your parents in the work of the school.

We did find many good things about your school. You benefit from sixth form life, are gaining qualifications and many of you are entering higher education. You enjoy many of your lessons but some are not interesting or challenging enough for you. You learn best when lessons are lively, your understanding is checked and you are shown how to improve your work. The majority of you behave well and get on well with each other, but a few of you disrupt lessons and make it hard for others to learn. Your headteacher and others in the school support you well when you have concerns and they are keen to improve your experience in school. The attendance figures are improving but some of you do not come to school when you should.

The governors have not worked well enough with school managers to help you achieve higher standards. We are asking them to draw up plans that set out how they will bring about improvements and we expect them to check that these are kept to. You will all need to play your part and to take responsibility for contributing to these improvements. A team of inspectors will return to the school in one year to check on the progress that the school is making. Our very best wishes to you for the future.