

Batchwood School

Townsend Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5RP

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2018

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school has been through a traumatic time. Standards fell because changes in leadership led to the school losing its focus and direction.
- Pupils' poor literacy skills limit their progress. Teachers' planning is not precise enough to improve these key skills rapidly.
- In some subjects, including English, pupils do not make enough progress. When pupils fall behind, the support they receive does not help them catch up quickly enough.
- The number of pupils on part-time timetables is too high. Attendance is rising, but is still very low.
- Although leaders can show compelling evidence that behaviour has improved, there is still too much low-level disruption in classes.
- Leadership across many areas of the school is new. As yet, leaders cannot fully show the impact that their actions have made.
- Teachers do not use the school's homework policy consistently well to help pupils build on their learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The new executive headteacher has galvanised staff and established effective systems for improving teaching and learning, and, as a result, pupils progress.
- The newly established leadership team has quickly grasped what needs doing. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses and have aspirational improvement plans in place.
- Governors are acting quickly to address the decline in standards. Their 'hands-on' approach helps them to identify and improve matters.
- Pupils emphatically said that they feel safe and well cared for.
- Staff feel reinvigorated. They feel supported, they have faith in their new leaders and they appreciate the new systems in place.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are extremely positive about the changes the new executive headteacher has made.
- The new system for rewarding pupils' positive behaviour is working. The number of incidents of poor behaviour is falling.
- Subjects such as art, science, sport and music enable pupils to make good progress. Leaders have maintained the strong provision in areas such as hair and beauty and outdoor learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers use the information they have on pupils' current abilities to plan work to improve pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
 - all staff use the school's homework policy to extend and build on the learning completed during the school day.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and welfare by:
 - eliminating low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons
 - streamlining the use of part-time timetables to raise levels of attendance so that they are closer to the national average.
- Increase the rate of pupils' progress so that it is consistently good across all year groups and all subjects by:
 - ensuring that teachers track carefully pupils' progress throughout the school and provide extra help quickly when pupils fall behind.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - embedding the systems that the new leadership team has introduced so that leaders can demonstrate the difference their actions make on raising pupils' progress and improving the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has been through a turbulent period. Changes in headship failed to provide continuity or sustain the high standards seen at the time of the previous inspection. Standards dropped because leaders' expectations were too low. Systems to monitor and improve pupils' behaviour and progress were ineffective. Staff felt demoralised because they felt they were not supported and just 'left to get on with things'.
- Previously, too many pupils were placed on part-time timetables because their behaviour was not good enough. The new leadership team, which inherited this issue, has greatly increased the proportion of pupils receiving a full-time education. Leaders acknowledge that more pupils need to be in education more regularly.
- Inspection evidence shows that pupils' behaviour is improving; fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly, and staff generally manage pupils' behaviour well. There is still some low-level disruption in classes that disrupts the learning of others, but it is reducing over time.
- Leaders have overseen an improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils' progress in lessons is improving. This is because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen, alongside leaders' systems to manage behaviour more effectively.
- Since his arrival ten months ago, the new executive head has started to transform the school. Having inherited a disjointed group of staff, he has quickly gained their trust, and is supporting them well. Staff are now a cohesive team. They have a renewed optimism and sense of purpose, while remaining dedicated and passionate about improving pupils' life chances. All of the staff spoken to could highlight the positive changes seen since the arrival of the new executive head. For example, pupils make better progress, although some legacy issues mean that it is still too low in some areas.
- The new leadership team and governors have produced a highly accurate self-evaluation document. Their evaluation is evidenced through their robust tracking and monitoring processes. Leaders' ability to accurately identify the school's effectiveness is a real strength. It gives leaders a valuable baseline for their improvement plans, which are realistic but aspirational. Their early analysis shows that they are starting to turn the school around. However, many of their changes are new and need to be further embedded before the full benefit of their actions can be seen. Although the judgement has declined significantly since the last inspection, in context, this is an improving school.
- Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the school. The possible federation with another local special school will provide useful opportunities for staff development and increased collaboration with staff from the other school. Their improvements are not predicated on quick wins or fast gains, but built solidly on the foundations of clear systems and processes that are not overly reliant on one person. Their model of sharing leadership responsibilities across all staff is to ensure that improvements currently being seen are sustainable over the longer term.
- Leaders' comprehensive tracking of pupils' performance shows that last year not

enough pupils made the progress they should have made. Their objective is unequivocal; more pupils need to make better progress. The new executive head has brought a renewed focus to the school and, together with staff, has raised the expectations of how pupils should behave and what they can achieve. Although it is still early days, current pupils are making better progress and their behaviour is improving.

- Leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment shows an improving picture. Inspection evidence supports these views. Leaders are developing staff skills further through coaching trios and closer collaboration with a federated school. The additional training that staff receive on a weekly basis is helping them to meet pupils' needs more effectively.
- The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. There is a range of bespoke options available that helps pupils choose subjects linked to their interests and future plans. Pupils value the increased number of extra-curricular activities available, including at lunchtime, saying that these help them to build skills across different areas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed well. Through assemblies, tutor time and the day-to-day contact with staff, pupils learn how to respect themselves and others. They understand how British values are preparing them for life when they leave school. They are taught and appreciate the difference between 'banter' and 'bullying'. Pupils like the new reward system and enrichment programme because they promote good behaviour well. The high-quality display work throughout the school highlights current and past pupils' successes and promotes a clear anti-bullying agenda.
- Inspectors spoke to parents as part of the process. The vast majority were extremely positive about the school and the difference it had made to their children's lives. One parent said that, since the arrival of the new executive headteacher, the school had gone from 'strength to strength'. Another parent talked about the 'meteoric change' she had seen in her child, who now 'never misses a day', highlighting that this has 'changed our lives'.

Governance of the school

- Governors acted quickly and decisively to ensure that the decline in standards was not prolonged. Their 'hands-on' approach and frequent visits to the school meant that they were able to spot these issues and deal with them before they became ingrained. A governor said, 'The school is now on an upward trajectory, but we know there is still more work to do before it is a good school.'
- Governors are helping to turn the school around. They share the ambitions of the leadership team and notice the work leaders have already done to secure improvements.
- Governors monitor the spending of additional funding to ensure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is in line with that of their peers, and that those who arrive with poor literacy or numeracy skills are helped to catch up. However, they acknowledge that the scrutiny of the spend needs to be sharper so they can identify more precisely the effectiveness of the many different support packages provided.
- Governors ensure that the school meets its statutory responsibilities. The link

safeguarding governor checks arrangements routinely. Governors receive appropriate training to help them understand their responsibilities linked to keeping pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Safeguarding records are well kept, policies are adhered to and staff are well trained. Staff know which signs to look for to see whether a child is at risk or vulnerable. They are also confident to report concerns. Any concerns made are dealt with appropriately to ensure that pupils remain safe. Staff work well alongside other agencies to ensure that pupils get the help they need, but need to be even more insistent if they feel this is taking too long.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Pupils do not make as much progress as they could because in some lessons teachers do not focus on improving pupils' literacy skills sufficiently well. This means that pupils are not filling in the gaps in their learning, so they are unable to grasp some of the new concepts being covered. This prevents them from making more rapid progress.
- In a few lessons, pupils disturb the learning of others. Teachers' skilful use of the school's policies helps to minimise disruption, but learning time is still lost on occasion.
- Teachers plan lessons well. Pupils are keen to do well because teachers carefully plan a variety of activities that capture their interest, but also make them think. This is allowing current pupils to make better progress. However, more precise planning with an increased focus on pupils' literacy skills would drive improvements further.
- In most subjects, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. As a result, pupils work hard and concentrate well. This is reflected in their books and seen in the difficulty of the work that they cover. Most pupils' work is well presented, and some of the work in mathematics is immaculate.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and effective use of technical vocabulary helps pupils extend their learning. Teachers guide pupils well on how to improve their work. In some areas, pupils are not always acting on that advice.
- Where practice is most effective, such as in science, art and music, teachers' high expectations, well-established routines and consistency of approach mean that pupils develop their understanding well. The work in pupils' books or folders shows that they make good progress over time. The bespoke programmes seen in hair and beauty and outdoor learning meet pupils' needs well, helping them to learn effectively.
- Current pupils are now making better progress in most subjects, including English, and the work seen in pupils' books shows a significant upturn from some of that seen last year. This is because teachers use a broader range of teaching styles and set different work for different pupils, helping them to learn more effectively.
- The positive relationships that staff have built with the pupils is a real strength. Pupils are making better progress because they appreciate the work that teachers do and want to do well for them.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils cannot benefit from the provision if they are not in school and attending regularly. This impacts on their welfare as it prevents them from developing the skills required to progress into further education or employment when they leave. Leaders have significantly reduced the proportion of pupils on part-time timetables, but too many remain.
- Some staff in safeguarding roles are relatively new. They safeguard pupils effectively. However, they sometimes need to chase up external agencies more rigorously if they feel that pupils are not getting the help or support they need.
- Leaders have introduced stretch targets to support pupils to achieve more. These are used well, alongside displays highlighting current and former pupils' achievements. These help raise pupils' aspirations of what they can achieve. The school showcases well some high-quality artwork from current pupils, helping to raise expectations.
- Staff are patient, understanding and committed to helping pupils. Pupils, many with previously negative experiences of education, are supported well so that they re-engage in learning, raise their self-esteem and are successful in education, often for the first time in their lives. Leaders' systematic tracking of pupils' social and emotional development paints a positive picture.
- The school provides a welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and secure. The vast majority of pupils respect the school and their surroundings.
- Most pupils like and are proud of their school. The majority move from lesson to lesson in an orderly way. Staff model expected behaviours well to ensure that those who do not yet behave well are guided on how to do so successfully.
- The careers advice and guidance programme helps pupils to move into successful placements when they leave the school. Last year, all pupils progressed to either education or employment. Some took up apprenticeships following successful work experience placements at the same employer.
- The careful use of alternative provision helps give all pupils a clear route for their next steps when they leave the school. Staff monitor the attendance and achievement of these pupils well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Staff clearly follow the new processes for dealing with poor behaviour. This has reduced the number of pupils being removed from class and the frequency of low-level disruption. Pupils said that they have seen better behaviour since the arrival of the new executive headteacher. However, low-level disruption remains high and still disrupts

the learning of others.

- Leaders' effective actions have improved the attendance of pupils across almost all year groups significantly. This was from a low base point, and pupils' overall attendance still falls way below the national average. There remains a small group of pupils with high rates of absence, who are affecting this figure, although these are reducing over time.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils are helping to guide pupils to make much improved behaviour choices. Pupils are becoming more familiar with the systems and realise that staff will follow through on sanctions for poor behaviour. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of exclusions this year compared with last year. However, there are still some pupils who find it difficult to adjust to leaders' raised expectations for behaviour, and the number being removed from class or excluded is still too high.
- Pupils said that bullying is rare. Evidence collected on inspection confirmed this to be the case. Pupils are confident that, if they had a problem, staff would deal with it quickly and effectively. Some spoke about how staff had helped to deal with problems they had outside of school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress from their different starting points is not yet good. Leaders rightly acknowledge that the main barrier to improving pupils' progress is weak literacy skills. There are clear plans in place to address this, for example a wide range of bespoke interventions and increased use of homework to develop pupils' basic skills. Additionally, their new assessment system gives staff a better picture of where pupils are doing well and where additional support is required. However, these are at an early stage at present and the full impact of these actions is yet to be seen.
- While teaching, learning and assessment are improving, pupils' attainment is still not high enough. Last year, pupils gained a range of GCSEs in subjects including English, mathematics and science. However, pupils' final grades did not always reflect good progress from their starting points, and too many left without completing qualifications.
- Pupils across all subjects make better progress in key stage 3 than their counterparts in key stage 4. This is because too many pupils have been on part-time timetables. These pupils, many of them older pupils, have considerable gaps in their learning. While current pupils' progress is improving, some legacy issues mean that published results are likely to be below average again next year.
- There is no in-school difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and that made by non-disadvantaged pupils. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to monitor the use of the pupil premium funding closely so that they can better evaluate the impact of different interventions.
- The progress that current pupils make is improving. Pupils make better progress in science and mathematics, and this is more evident in the lower years. English still lags behind, and, while progress is less rapid in English, improvements are being seen.
- Pupils' results in art, sport, food technology and music last year show that they made good progress. In these subjects, pupils often achieved either in line with or, in some

cases, exceeded their target grades. The work that current pupils produce shows similarly strong outcomes. One pupil, whose work was being displayed around the school, said, 'When I came here, I couldn't draw or paint at all.'

- Careers advice and pupils' transition are managed carefully and successfully. Pupils progress to a wide range of courses, including springboard courses and apprenticeships. All pupils progressed into either further education, training or employment last year.

School details

Unique reference number	117674
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023560

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kerry Pollard
Headteacher	Jonathan Kemp
Telephone number	01727 868021
Website	www.batchwood.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@batchwood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 March 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Batchwood School is a special school for boys and girls who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties; an increasing proportion of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- Almost all pupils are White British.
- A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language.

- The school uses alternative providers to extend the curriculum opportunities for pupils at key stage 4. These are City & Guilds Plastering, Building 1 Zone and Woodside Motor Cross.
- The number of pupils on part-time timetables has reduced over the past year, but still remains high.
- All staff are trained in Hertfordshire Steps, a behaviour management approach that teaches de-escalation and restrictive physical intervention techniques.
- There have been significant changes in leadership since the previous inspection report. These culminated in a new executive headteacher being seconded from a neighbouring special school in March 2017. Since then, he has appointed a new leadership team and introduced new processes and systems.
- A new deputy headteacher was appointed in June 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out observations, most of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also visited tutor group sessions and spoke informally with pupils at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' work, heard pupils read, and talked to groups of pupils from different year groups formally to discuss their experience of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, staff and governors.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with staff members from the alternative providers that the school uses and the school's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation including safeguarding records, case studies, attendance records, self-evaluation summaries, the school's improvement plan and current assessment information.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to consider. There were no responses to either the pupil or staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Fyfe Johnston

Ofsted Inspector

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