

Barnwell School

Address: Barnwell, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 9SW

Unique reference number (URN): 117518

Inspection report: 6 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	● ●
Urgent improvement	

✓ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Staff here are fully committed to supporting pupils with their welfare and readiness to learn. They swiftly and accurately identify pupils' specific needs. When appropriate, they tailor precise and effective interventions to support the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school uses advice from external professionals to inform staff training and guidance to support pupils so they can learn successfully. Staff make appropriate and carefully considered adaptations to their teaching so that all pupils can access the curriculum.

Specialist teachers work with pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan to support pupils to learn the curriculum effectively and develop their social and emotional resilience. Staff, including school counsellors, and 'Tilly', the school's therapy dog, support pupils to promote and sustain their mental health. When pupils join the school during the school year they are swiftly integrated into the school's inclusive community. Pupils build their self-esteem, engage in school life and learn well. Leaders and pastoral staff work closely with a range of local professionals and services, including providers of alternative provision. This helps pupils engage with education and move on to appropriate next steps.

Leaders use the pupil premium funding appropriately to design support. They ensure that resources are allocated to support disadvantaged pupils and help them take an active part in school life. These include help to take part in the many trips and programmes that raise pupils' aspirations and help them to learn about the world of work.

Expected standard ●

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard ●

Leaders have established a broad, increasingly ambitious curriculum. Pupils in key stage 4 choose from a range of academic and vocational courses. Teachers consistently follow the 'Barnwell Way' in how they teach. This approach helps pupils know what to expect in lessons and quickly settle into their learning. Most gain secure foundations in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have improved staff expertise to ensure that teachers typically deliver the intended curriculum well and have suitable knowledge of the subjects they teach. They are clear what pupils need to learn and why. Teachers introduce new learning clearly and check carefully that pupils understand and build on their prior learning. They adjust the curriculum to close gaps in pupils' knowledge and address any misunderstandings effectively.

Staff use information about pupils' needs to adapt the curriculum so that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can access it alongside their peers. The school accurately identifies those pupils who find reading hard. Staff provide personalised support, such as phonics, to ensure that pupils improve their reading as quickly as possible. On occasions, the curriculum is not taught as well as intended. When

this happens, pupils find it hard to engage with parts of the curriculum, and do not always gain the depth of knowledge that they should.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear and accurate view of the school's many positives, such as its inclusive ethos and provision. They also recognise the important and connected areas where it needs to improve, particularly attendance and the impact on pupils' outcomes. There are realistic and well-considered intentions to embed improvements that are underway, so that pupils attend and achieve consistently well. Leaders track precisely the quality of teaching and learning carefully to check how well their actions are improving standards for pupils. New senior leaders have built successfully on the school's work. This work is raising expectations for pupils' attendance and achievement.

The school makes all decisions in the best interests of pupils. Staff go the extra mile to ensure that pupils are safe and happy. The school effectively uses external support and guidance to develop its work and to provide tailored support for vulnerable pupils. Governors are well informed. They increasingly provide appropriate challenge to ensure that the school's provision is effective. Staff, including teachers in the early stages of their careers, receive high-quality training to carry out their roles, including their work in keeping pupils safe. This professional learning continues to improve the quality and teaching of the curriculum. Staff feel very well supported for their wellbeing and workload and enjoy working here.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils at Barnwell are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn the importance of right and wrong, and how to treat each other as equals. They learn about different faiths and enjoy learning about the variety of cultures in school. Themed whole-school events such as foodbank projects and character education days promote values of 'respect, responsibility, and aspiration'. The recently updated personal, social and health education curriculum is comprehensive and generally well delivered. It promotes fundamental British values and helps pupils learn statutory content such as age-appropriate relationships and sex education and health education. Pupils learn how to stay safe, both on and offline. Pastoral leaders provide swift and effective support for any pupils who feel unsafe or need help for their mental health and welfare.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of clubs. These reflect and develop a wide range of interests and talents, including creative arts, sports and games. Many pupils, especially in the middle school, attend at least one club. Pupils are supported to attend a range of educational trips and visits. There are many popular rewards trips. The school's careers education and guidance provision is a strength. Pupils encounter a wide range of employers and further and higher education providers. They enjoy work experience opportunities and visit different universities. This comprehensive offer raises pupils' aspirations and informs their future options.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Sixth-form students enjoy their studies. They say the post-16 provision feels like a close family. Staff give students considerable support and guidance to help them succeed in school and after they leave. This support includes regular mentoring sessions and comprehensive guidance for applications to apprenticeships, higher education and employment. Students have first-hand experience of the world of work. Staff teach students how to manage their time effectively. In form time, students learn about current affairs and relevant topics such as being a safe driver, healthy relationships and the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

Students attend well in the sixth form. They contribute to the wider school, for instance in running student leadership groups. This equips them to succeed in life and be active citizens.

The sixth-form curriculum and provision is broad, diverse and open to all. Students increasingly benefit from high-quality teaching. As a result, most students largely achieve well by the end of their time in sixth form. Students who resit their GCSEs are very well supported to gain the qualifications they need to access sixth-form courses. Students who study vocational qualifications achieve highly.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Too many pupils who do not attend school regularly miss essential aspects of learning and develop significant gaps in their knowledge. Although the school works with much success to identify and to close these gaps, these pupils do not gain the secure breadth and depth of knowledge they need to achieve well in national tests and examinations.

Pupils who attend school regularly benefit from effective teaching and achieve well. Over time, these pupils develop their confidence and ability to communicate their ideas clearly and accurately. They learn, remember and apply important curriculum knowledge that prepares them well for their next steps. Many of these pupils achieve well in national tests and examinations.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Some groups of pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This has a significant negative impact on their achievement and they miss out on social opportunities and enrichment experiences. Leaders work increasingly closely with pupils, parents and carers, to promote the importance of regular attendance and to provide support for pupils and families. Some systems introduced by leaders to support pupils to attend well are new, so the full impact of these approaches is not clearly evident.

Leaders have established clear and high expectations of how pupils should conduct themselves. The majority of pupils behave well, follow the agreed school routines and show

positive attitudes to their learning. Classrooms are typically calm and focused so pupils can learn effectively. When teaching is most effective, pupils enthusiastically commit to their studies. Staff and pupils have positive relationships. Pupils are typically keen to succeed. They strive to be 'zero heroes', gaining rewards and recognition for high standards of behaviour, effort and attendance. Bullying and unkind behaviour, including discrimination, are increasingly rare. Leaders deal with any instances of poor behaviour effectively. Pastoral leaders provide pupils with very effective support to meet their emotional needs and promote positive attitudes to learning.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils typically enjoy learning at Barnwell School. They increasingly benefit from an ambitious, well-thought-out curriculum and engaging lessons. Consequently, pupils who attend well learn and achieve well. They gain the important knowledge they need to do their best and to move on to their next steps. However, a significant proportion of pupils do not attend school regularly. As a result, these pupils develop gaps in their knowledge and do not achieve highly.

Staff are fully committed to ensuring that every pupil enjoys school and gets the support they need. Staff know pupils, including students in the sixth form, very well. Staff tirelessly identify pupils' individual needs and support them to tackle any barriers to their personal development and learning. If pupils require specialist help or guidance, staff provide or arrange this in a timely way.

The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves very well around school and in lessons. Pupils say that the school is a safe and positive place to be. They have positive relationships with each other and with staff. If pupils find it hard to meet leaders' high expectations for their behaviour, staff provide the support they need to improve. Pupils look out for each other. For instance, sixth form students enjoy listening to younger pupils read to help them improve their reading knowledge and skills.

Pupils develop their character and broaden their interests through the school's extensive personal development programme. There is a wide range of enrichment activities, such as boxing, science events and sporting competitions. Pupils meet a wide range of employers as they learn about the world of work. This enables them to make informed choices about the next stage in their education, employment or training. Pupils gain an understanding of the importance of diversity when they learn about the cultures and heritages of pupils at the school.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that effective strategies are in place to improve attendance for all groups of pupils.

- Leaders should continue to support staff to embed and sustain high-quality teaching across the curriculum so that all pupils achieve highly.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

The inspection team spoke with school leaders, including the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator. They also held discussions with representatives of the local governing board.

Inspectors spoke to leaders at other provisions who work with the school's looked-after children and those attending alternative provision. Inspectors also spoke to the school effectiveness adviser, staff and pupils during the inspection.

Inspectors considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The headteacher and executive headteacher have been appointed to their roles within the last 12 months.

The school makes use of 9 alternative provisions, 8 of which are unregistered.

Headteacher: Maria Townsend

Lead inspector:

Steve Woodley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Susan Pryor, Ofsted Inspector

Steven Hogan, Ofsted Inspector

Polly Lankester, Ofsted Inspector

Louise Cooper, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 6 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,315

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,590

Well above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

30.07%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.56%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

18.10%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	36.9%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	33.2%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	37.0%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	41.4	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.6	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	43.1	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.32	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.31	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	18.8%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	20.6%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	24.4%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	32.3	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.8	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	33.8	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.87	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	18.8%	52.8%	-34.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	20.6%	53.1%	-32.5 pp
2022/23 (final)	24.4%	52.4%	-28.0 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	32.3	50.3	-17.9
2023/24 (final)	31.8	50.0	-18.2
2022/23 (final)	33.8	50.3	-16.5

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.87	0.16	-1.04
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	0.17	-0.78

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	93%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	93%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	92%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	30.54	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	31.09	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	29.47	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.5	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.5	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	10.4%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.8%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.7%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	26.9%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	31.0%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.5%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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