

Inspection of Balcarras School

East End Road, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL53 8QF

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 March 2025
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected Balcarras School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged Balcarras School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, before it opened as an academy. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

The headteacher of this school is Dominic Burke. The school is part of The Balcarras Trust, which means other people in the trust have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), who is also the headteacher of the school, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Bernard Roberts.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and staff have huge pride in their school. The school is highly ambitious for pupils to enjoy a broad and well-designed curriculum. It has the highest expectations for all pupils, both for their academic achievement and to be part of a positive and inclusive school community. Pupils and students make exceptional progress in their learning.

Pupils are highly courteous and respectful, towards one another and with staff and visitors. The house and sixth form team provide exemplary pastoral care and support to pupils and their families when they need it. Incidents of bullying or unkind behaviour are unusual and promptly managed by staff. As a result, reported concerns are especially low.

From before the school day, through to after school, pupils and students immerse themselves in the life of the school and the community. During lunchtime, very many pupils participate in a plethora of events and clubs. For example, a visit from a prominent speaker to meet pupils for a question-and-answer session was highly attended. Pupils asked pertinent questions and had a keen interest. At the start of the day, a significant number of pupils arrive early for badminton club. Motivated, they regulate their play with little staff instruction.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school is meticulous in its design of the curriculum. It is ambitious for pupils to study a broad range of subjects and enjoy their learning. The school has thought deeply about the content. It ensures pupils learn the precise knowledge and skills that support them as they move to new learning. For example, in design and technology, Year 7 pupils apply components to their practical work that lead to more highly skilled work in Year 11.

Pupils and students are thoroughly informed for the decisions they make at each milestone. The sixth form offers a broad range of A-level subjects. Students learn widely around their subjects and engage with opportunities to enhance this. For example, many students complete the Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award. They continue to their chosen pathways at a wide range of universities and institutions.

In lessons, pupils work hard and interact positively with their learning. Teachers check thoroughly what pupils know and remember. They respond quickly to address any misunderstandings. As a result, pupils have a strong recall of their learning. In mathematics, for example, teachers revisit the fundamental basics which pupils need when they move to more-complex learning. This ensures they can apply their knowledge confidently.

The school is diligent in checking how well pupils can read. When pupils have gaps in their reading knowledge, the school ensures they learn the precise content which they need. The school specifically plans reading to deepen pupils' knowledge of the subjects they study. For example, the sixth-form geography reading group discusses texts that are preparing them to think about concepts they may study beyond A level.

Pupils and students are highly engaged and motivated to share their thinking and reflections about their learning. They explore ideas creatively. Teachers identify the needs of pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and make adaptations to their learning when they need it to secure their understanding. These strategies are thoroughly embedded in lessons. This ensures all pupils learn the ambitious content of the curriculum.

The personal development programme meticulously embeds experiences throughout the curriculum to prepare pupils for life beyond school. Pupils and students actively take on roles of citizenship within the community. For example, working with the parish council, they support members of the community with computer skills or run a chess club. Pupils and students thrive in taking on leadership roles which they enact positively to contribute to school life.

The school skilfully integrates careers education through the curriculum. Pupils make clear connections between what they learn and the world of work. They have many experiences with employers and providers of further education throughout their time at the school. For example, the 'boost' programme supports students to develop their confidence through giving presentations to employers in a formal setting.

The school works extensively with the education community beyond school. For example, it has lead roles through its work as a teaching hub and through leading the mathematics hub. The school engages with a wide range of educational institutions in its work. It reflects on this to inform the work it does to ensure sustained school improvement. Staff share their educational research widely with one another. They use this to shape the learning for pupils. Parents and carers, pupils and the community hold the work of the school in high regard.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and](#)

[protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136474
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10344595
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,433
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	459
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Bernard Roberts
CEO of the trust	Dominic Burke
Headteacher	Dominic Burke
Website	www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Balcarras Trust. There are currently three secondary schools in the trust.
- The school runs a teaching school hub. The GLOW maths hub is also based at the school. It works with a wide number of local and national educational establishments.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, design and technology, and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of trustees and representatives from the local governing body, including the chair and vice-chair.
- Inspectors met with pupils and students from key stages 3, 4 and 5 to hear about their experiences of school. They observed the school during breaktimes and visited tutor times, lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, self-evaluation documents, minutes of governance, reports of external visits and audits and records of behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also viewed the responses to the online pupil survey and the responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Rachel Hesketh, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Benjamin Houghton

Ofsted Inspector

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