

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street T 0300 123 1231
Edgbaston Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
B15 1LH www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 3291
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com



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Dr Rory Fox
Principal
The Basildon Upper Academy
Wickford Avenue
Basildon
SS13 3HL

Dear Dr Fox

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Basildon Upper Academy

Following my visit with Kevin Sheldrick Her Majesty's Inspector and Karen Roche Additional Inspector, to your academy on 26–27 September 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 14 March 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. Newly qualified teachers may only be appointed following consultation with and permission from the monitoring HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Academies Advisers Unit of the DfE and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form by:
 - providing a curriculum that captures students' interest and imagination
 - ensuring that students are taught to synthesise information from a variety of sources and to write their responses in their own words
 - ensuring that students are taught to use and apply mathematics to real-life situations to further their understanding of the concepts and skills being learnt
 - ensuring that students receive regular and specific guidance on how to improve their work
 - ensuring that students build up and take responsibility for compiling a coherent record of their learning and progress
 - ensuring that sixth-form students are adequately prepared for the courses they take.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of independent work that students can complete in each lesson
 - using the most effective teachers, and external support if necessary, to work with colleagues to help them devise interesting, enjoyable and challenging lessons that hold students' attention
 - requiring teachers to plan explicitly to meet the needs of students working at three or more different National Curriculum levels in lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers understand the benefits of checking students' progress as they work in order to assess their understanding and to ensure that all are being continuously challenged
 - providing rigorous and specific monitoring to identify improvements needed, backed up by bespoke advice and professional development to enable each teacher to raise the quality of their teaching.

- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - increasing attendance and reducing persistent absence rates as a matter of urgency, particularly among disabled students and those who have special educational needs, so that they are much closer to the national average
 - reducing the reliance on sanctions by finding more constructive approaches to securing and sustaining good behaviour
 - developing a clear programme to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through lessons, tutor periods and extra-curricular opportunities
 - giving students a greater say in voicing their ideas for improving the running of the academy
 - implementing a stronger programme of anti-bullying measures so that racist

- and homophobic bullying is eliminated
- identifying and addressing the reasons why some students do not feel safe in the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the Academy Trust's capacity for educational leadership, for example, through strategic partnerships
 - increasing leadership capacity, for example, by forming partnerships to provide effective support and guidance for senior and middle leaders
 - completing the restructuring of leadership roles to provide clear lines of accountability, particularly in relation to disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - developing a stronger role for subject leaders in improving teaching and learning, ensuring that each group of subjects has a specific development programme
 - making regular checks that agreed procedures are being implemented consistently and challenging staff when inconsistencies occur
 - ensuring that the academy complies with all health and safety requirements.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26-27 September 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The Basildon Upper Academy and The Basildon Lower Academy are part of The Basildon Academies Trust. Since the last inspection leadership structures have been changed so that each academy, for the most part, has a leadership team of its own. Since the last inspection 32 teachers left the staff covering the upper and lower academies. One third of the senior leadership team have left and all posts have been re-designed.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Learning in the lessons observed during this monitoring inspection was inconsistent but much improved on that found during the last inspection. Inadequate progress in lessons is now rare. Inspectors observed only one lesson where the rate of learning was inadequate. Of the remaining twenty lessons that inspectors graded, learning was good in exactly a half and required improvement in a half. The legacy of underachievement has led to too many students still working below national expectations and there remains too much variability between subjects.

There is evidence of interventions and better quality teaching having a positive impact on raising students' achievement. As a result there was a sharp increase in the summer 2012 GCSE results. The proportion of students gaining five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics rose to 45%, so rising above the government's floor standard. The academy's specialism is in mathematics where both attainment and the proportion of students making expected progress has risen and closed the gap rapidly on the national average. English results showed improvements for some groups of pupils, but for summer 2011 Year 11 students, unvalidated results for English show a fall in both attainment and expected progress. Science results have improved. Across other subjects there was a mixed picture. Much of the improved achievement has been amongst students entitled to free school meals because of interventions funded by the pupil premium.

In the sixth form the average point score per student has increased. This academic year more effective arrangements have been developed to recruit an increased number of students to courses that are more appropriate. This includes a level 1/2 course that has helped reduce the number of students who are no longer in education, employment or training (NEET). The academy is adopting more challenging targets. Sixth form students are benefitting from increased opportunities

to support younger students in the lower academy for instance through a reading programme

The quality of teaching

The academy has largely eliminated inadequate teaching. Overall students are experiencing more good teaching which is helping them to learn more effectively, but there is not yet enough good teaching. There is still too much teaching that requires improvement, mainly because it does not meet the needs of the different abilities of students in lessons.

Lessons are more engaging because teachers generally have a good rapport with students and learning is often linked to real-life contexts that capture their interest. In the better lessons teachers ensure high levels of concentration through questioning that involves all learners. For instance, students are expected to critically evaluate each other's responses. In a construction lesson students' understanding of site safety was deepened because the teacher insisted on more extensive responses. Teachers do not always provide students with sufficient opportunity to work independently. Teachers consistently attempt to identify the outcomes for different-ability students in lesson plans, but there is too much variability in how these plans are delivered. Lessons do not meet students' literacy needs often enough. An exception was a sixth form economics lesson where 'writing frames' were used to enable students to more actively analyse the reasons for decisions.

Teachers rarely have the confidence to adjust their lessons in response to the learning. At times, work is repeated unnecessarily or gaps in learning are missed. In better lessons there is a strong focus on promoting higher-order thinking. For instance, in a good personal development lesson students were expected to critically evaluate teenage blogs. This personal development course has been newly introduced and is enhancing students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development.

Students regularly receive feedback on their work, including through regular marking. This is encouraging students to work harder and, at times, is helping them to improve. Currently students do not receive consistently precise feedback that enables them to improve their performance. Some examples were seen of students being actively involved in assessing work using agreed criteria, but this was unusual. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is improving as students benefit from the allocation of more staff with previous experience of teaching in this phase.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy has implemented a robust set of actions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence, including more effective work with parents. As a result of

the actions taken there has been improvement in the first three weeks of this term compared with the same period last year. Persistent absence is less than half the percentage that it was at the same time last year, but still significantly above the national average. The attendance of disabled students and those who have special educational needs has dramatically improved this term. In particular, those who have statements of special educational needs and those who are on school action plus are attending much more regularly which is having a positive effect on their learning. Significantly fewer students are arriving late, due to robust action and changing the academy day so that students start lessons immediately and tutorial time is later. Generally, students arrive to lessons on time.

Behaviour is thought by students, teachers and leaders, to be the area that has improved the most in the past six months. Now, behaviour seen around the academy is calm and courteous. Students conduct themselves maturely in social spaces and they have good relationships with each other and with members of staff. Most teachers create a purposeful culture for learning and students respond appropriately. In the best lessons, students' self-manage their behaviour so that it has a significantly positive impact on their progress in lessons.

Other major advances include students being eager to work towards the wide range of rewards they can attain. They proudly wear their 'employability badges' that are awarded for excellent attendance and behaviour. Prefects have striven to be given the position and consider their roles to be effective in teaching and learning, welfare, and environment. Students feel that they are given ample opportunities to make their views known and are satisfied that they will be taken account of and acted on if appropriate. The work of the academy council is known about by all students through presentations in assemblies.

The use of sanctions has decreased significantly compared with the same time last year. The 'inclusion area' provides students with a calm environment if they are removed from lessons so they can continue working and work through their issues with a member of staff. Last year, on average 100 students per day visited the area whilst this term the highest record is 15. The internal exclusion facility is also used less. Exclusion data is closely monitored but it is too early to be confident that exclusion rates will fall to national average by the end of the year.

Students now feel safer in the academy because of rigorous work that has been included in the curriculum to reduce bullying. They understand that all forms, including physical, verbal, homophobic, cyber, are wrong. Students have individually signed contracts to state that they will not bully others and will support others who feel threatened by following an agreed code.

The academy has a comprehensive single central record of staff checks in place. The last inspection report highlighted some issues of concern regarding health and safety. Since then there have been improvements in science classrooms and preparation rooms so that the issues have been resolved.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The increasing strength of the academy's leadership is demonstrated in the improvements since the previous inspection, most notably in transforming the culture of behaviour and in boosting attainment. As a result of the Principal's clear vision and strong leadership, inadequate teaching has been largely eliminated as a result of good coaching and professional development, or where teachers have proved unable to improve, robust action to remove them. The academy has worked effectively to improve the work of an identified group of teachers but has yet to implement a consistent professional development programme to raise the quality of teaching for all staff. Performance management processes are embryonic and have yet to have impact for most teachers. The support for newly qualified teachers is strong resulting in early responsibility for some. Governance has been strengthened through additional appointments.

New leadership and management arrangements have only been in place since the beginning of the month and so have had little time to demonstrate impact. Leaders and other staff are positive about the clearer lines of accountability, but the academy recognises the need for middle leaders to develop the expertise needed to monitor and raise the quality of teaching within their faculties. Senior leaders have acknowledged that increasing knowledge and experience of national issues in their subjects and of good practice in other academies is the next step in their development.

In the sixth form, students spoke enthusiastically about the changes made. They like the more distinctive nature of the provision. They are receiving clear guidance and support, for instance, in terms of university applications. They are also benefitting from increased opportunities to develop leadership skills, for example, through their active involvement in developing a common room and library. The recently-appointed head of sixth form has quickly had a positive impact on provision in this phase. She recognises the need to improve the use of data related to student targets and the analysis of destinations of students to improve the provision further.

The academy's original statement of action was judged as not fit for purpose. Since then a concise plan has been produced with clear targets and milestones which are being achieved.

External support

Over the last year the academy has received what it describes as 'extraordinary' external support in the form of loaned staff from local schools to help with improvement projects. The academy has utilised support and advice from a range of independent consultants and sought the advice of the local authority. The positive impact can be seen in the improvements outlined above.