

The Bulwell Academy

Squires Avenue, Nottingham, NG6 8HG

Inspection dates

13–14 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Achievement is inadequate. The majority of students do not make the progress they should, across all subjects and year groups.
- While all groups of students are underachieving, the progress of the most-able students is particularly poor.
- Teaching is inadequate. Students are not challenged enough and teachers do not mark students work regularly or provide the necessary feedback to improve.
- Students' attitudes to learning are often poor and teachers do not challenge unacceptable behaviour consistently.
- Attendance is alarmingly low. One in five students is persistently absent.
- The sixth form requires improvement. A significant minority of students do not make the progress expected of them.
- Leadership and management are inadequate as leaders and the Governing Body have not secured the essential improvements needed to overcome significant weaknesses in students' outcomes. They are therefore not demonstrating sufficient capacity to raise standards to where they should be.

The school has the following strengths

- There is some good teaching in the academy.
- Students' achievement in English and mathematics has improved.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making better progress than previously.
- The academy's leaders have started taking action to address several areas of weakness, including making radical changes to the staffing structure and to the curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 41 lessons taught by 39 teachers. Five of these observations were conducted jointly with three senior members of the academy's staff. In addition, the inspection team made a number of shorter visits to lessons to look at specific aspects of students' work.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and some subject leaders. An interview took place with two representatives of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector conducted a telephone interview with a representative of one of the academy's sponsors. Meetings were also held with groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the Parent View questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed 69 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team evaluated other information including: the academy's self-evaluation; behaviour, attendance and exclusion records; information about students' achievement and progress; and documents used by leaders to monitor the academy's work.

Inspection team

Ian McNeilly, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christopher Crouch

Additional Inspector

Thelma McIntosh-Clark

Additional Inspector

Andrew Lyons

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- The Bulwell Academy is an average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. It has a subject specialism in business and enterprise. The academy is jointly sponsored by The Edge Foundation and Thomas Telford School.
- Most of the students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is well above average. This additional government funding is for students in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and some others.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The academy has specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs. This provides for three students with autism.
- A number of students attend courses offered by alternative providers of education: Skill Force and Nisai Learning in Nottingham, and Real Education in Ilkeston.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure the quality of teaching improves rapidly by ensuring that teachers:
 - have higher expectations of what students can achieve
 - make lessons more challenging and engaging
 - ask thought-provoking questions that extend students' understanding of, and interest in, their work.
- Raise the achievement of all groups, particularly the most-able students, by:
 - consistently setting tasks appropriate to students' ability levels
 - marking work regularly and rigorously so that students see that their efforts are valued and are able to understand how to make progress
 - using tutor time more constructively and consistently to support students' academic and personal development.
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring that all teachers address poor student behaviour, including low-level disruptions, consistently and rigorously
 - rapidly increasing student attendance through researching and implementing techniques used successfully in other schools.

■ Improve leadership and management by:

- increasing students' achievement across all subjects and all year groups through ensuring the quality of teaching improves rapidly
- ensuring that teachers and other members of the academy's staff receive training to help them address poor student behaviour successfully
- providing subject and other leaders with the skills they need to run their departments effectively.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the college's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- In 2013, 45% of students achieved five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grade C or above. This was a significant improvement on the 31% of students who achieved the same measure in 2012. The increase was mainly because of better achievement in English. The improved headline figure masks deep underachievement across all subjects and year groups.
- Rates of progress are too low in all subjects. Although this applies to students of all ages and abilities, the level of underachievement of the most able students is particularly poor. These students are most successful in English. Even then, only half of them make the progress they should. Only one in five of the most-able students make the progress they should in mathematics and the figure is less than one in 10 in core science, the subject that combines the three separate sciences. None of the most-able students achieved the progress they should have done in history.
- While the proportion of students making expected progress in English doubled in 2013, there is still some way to go before students' performance matches national averages. The improvement in English is due to better leadership and better teaching in this subject. Students' progress in mathematics improved between 2011 and 2012. While there was no decline in 2013, there was no further improvement and achievement remains well below average.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making better progress than in the past. The achievement of students supported through school action is improving, although it is still below national averages. The progress made by students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs has risen significantly; the achievement of this group of students is now in line with national averages. This improvement is mainly due to much better results in English, and because of the focused support these students receive. The academy's specially resourced unit for students with autism provides a good level of support for the students who benefit from it. As a result, these students make good progress from their various starting points.
- In 2013, the average results in examinations and the progress made by students supported by the pupil premium are lower than for other students in the academy. When compared to national averages, this group of students was one GCSE grade behind in English and one and one-third of a GCSE grade behind in mathematics. This is similar to the gap in 2011 and this required the academy to recover from a decline in 2012. Overall, therefore, there is too little improvement over time.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. The sixth form is a recent addition to the academy, having opened in 2011. There are now 50 students in Years 12 and 13. Most are taking vocational courses, though the number of academic courses is growing. Many sixth form students are not achieving as well as they should, though some do make progress.
- Prior to 2013, the teaching of literacy across the curriculum was, in the words of one senior leader, 'non-existent'. A new literacy strategy has been developed, and elements from it were seen in lesson planning during the inspection. It is too early to judge its impact on improvements in reading and writing.
- The academy has a well-resourced library. Reading for pleasure is promoted by the use of book boxes in selected tutor sessions, although not all teachers take advantage of this opportunity. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 have library lessons, as well as access to an online scheme which supports

and encourages students to read widely.

- Year 7 catch-up funding has been used to support students' progress in English and mathematics. Teaching assistants have been trained to work on a one-to-one basis with chosen students. School data shows that the progress of these students is accelerating.
- Early entry has been used by the academy for GCSE mathematics and many other GCSE subjects. This has not helped the students make the progress they should have done. This policy has now been changed by the Principal, though it has not been stopped entirely.
- The academy has a specialism in business and enterprise. Most Year 9 students will sit a business studies qualification this year. There are more than 40 local businesses who offer work experience placements for Year 10 students and these help students understand the world of employment.
- Twenty-two students currently spend some time in alternative provision. Almost all are disabled students and those who have special educational needs. While this has little positive impact on the students' GCSE results, they benefit from focusing on developing their basic skills. The academy monitors these students' progress when they are off site.
- Levels of achievement are greatly affected by the very high rates of absence. When students do not attend, they do not make the progress that is expected of them.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- The quality of teaching in the academy is variable. Much seen during the inspection was less than good. Teaching is inadequate because, over time, the majority of students have not made the progress they should.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what their students can achieve. Students are rarely stretched beyond what they can readily do. The highest targets set in many lessons are easily reachable for many students, especially for the most able.
- The lack of high expectations results in students producing work that is below their capabilities, particularly in the presentation of written work in lessons. They become content with the low aspirations set for them.
- Marking is generally of a poor standard and contributes to students not producing good enough work. Furthermore, they are not given regular feedback on how to improve their work to support the improvements that are needed.
- The quality of teachers' questioning is often poor. Simple responses from students are usually sufficient to meet the teachers' demands. Examples of questioning which provoked thought or which introduced difficult concepts were uncommon.
- Students have 15 minutes tutor time at the end of each day. This is not used consistently well. One session was shambolic, with badly torn pieces of paper hastily distributed in a weak attempt to get responses to a quiz. 'We're supposed to do work in this time, but we don't,' one student said. No students were engaged and behaviour was appalling due to the inadequate teaching. However, other sessions were prepared well by teachers and the time was used constructively.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement. Low-level questioning was apparent in some

lessons, and the level of work in some lessons did not match the needs of individual students.

- There is good teaching in the school, particularly in English, where students are challenged, are asked thought-provoking questions and have their individual needs met more often. As a result, students' rates of progress in English have increased.
- In an outstanding mathematics lesson, low-ability students were given challenging tasks in 'code breaking', which related to the whole-school focus week on the First World War. A very good Year 7 physical education lesson was observed, in which the teacher effectively modelled dance steps and challenged the students to create their own routines. Because of the teacher's good practice, the students' attitudes to learning were outstanding, something which was rarely seen during the inspection.
- The teaching of disabled students and those with special educational needs is improving and, as a result, these students are making better progress than before.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

- Students' behaviour is often managed poorly. Teachers and other members of staff are not rigorous enough or consistent enough in tackling poor behaviour. This limits the learning that takes place.
- More than half of the 69 members of staff who responded to the survey questionnaire either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: 'Behaviour is good at this school'. More than a third thought that policies were not consistently applied.
- Several of the small number of students surveyed expressed concerns over behaviour in the academy, saying it affected their learning in lessons.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not consistently good. In the best lessons, students are engaged by teaching that meets their needs and inspires thinking. However, the behaviour in many of the lessons observed was passive, even when the lesson content was good. When low-level disruption occurred, teachers often failed to address it. Occasionally, 'verbal warnings' were issued to little effect.
- There is a behaviour management policy; the senior leaders have data to show it being applied and apparently working well but there was no evidence of this during the inspection.
- There is some bullying in the school but students believe things are improving and that most incidents are low-level. The Principal undertook a comprehensive anti-bullying review in September and he has a strategy in place to tackle this, though it is too early to judge its long-term impact.
- Students feel safe and secure on the school site.
- Attendance in this school is extremely low. There is no particular group of students responsible for this. It is a problem across the whole student body. One in five students is persistently absent. This means that around 180 students each missed at least 158 hours of lessons over the school year.
- A new team is now in place responsible for improving attendance. Strategies to engage parents were weak but are now improving, and personal visits are being made to parents. It is too early

to judge the impact of these actions.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leadership and management are inadequate because senior leaders have not been effective in making essential improvements quickly enough, especially in the quality of teaching and attendance.
- The Principal and the academy's senior leaders have a realistic view of the challenges ahead of them and are committed to overcoming them. The Principal has made extensive changes to most areas of the academy. These include changes to staffing (including senior leaders), the timetable and the curriculum. However, other than improvements in students' progress in English, there is too little evidence of a positive effect on all weaknesses in achievement to demonstrate leaders' capacity for raising standards to appropriate levels.
- Prior to September 2013, the curriculum was inadequate and holding back students' progress. Much time was wasted on ineffective business-focused sessions. Students in Years 7 and 8 were not given sufficient time to study other subjects and then, from a low base of knowledge and skills, students were then asked to complete GCSE courses early. This has now changed but it is too early to judge any positive impact on achievement.
- The long-standing issue of unacceptably low student attendance has not been tackled successfully. Significant investment made in terms of staffing has yet to make an impact.
- A complete change in the staffing structure means that new subject leaders are in place. It is too early to judge their effectiveness.
- The Principal is beginning to link teachers' performance with their pay. Only half of the teachers who applied for a pay rise were given it; others were either refused or set targets to improve. A bonus system has been introduced for good teachers in successful departments.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development requires improvement, particularly in the spiritual aspect, which is not well promoted. Students are able to work well in groups and generally show respect for each other. Sixth form students reflected well on their own development and how their learning linked to their hopes for the future. Cultural enrichment is promoted well, and students can benefit from trips to theatres and galleries. Students' successes were displayed on a prominent wall to encourage aspiration.
- The academy's information, advice and guidance to students regarding careers are good. There is a comprehensive system of work experience placements for Year 10 students. Careers advice is overseen by the Bulwell Business Advice Board and there are strong partnerships with national and local businesses. The proportion of students leaving the academy and not being in education, employment or training is below the national average.
- One of the academy's sponsors, Thomas Telford School, is offering school development support and has a track record of success in this area. The current Principal of the academy was a senior leader at Thomas Telford and he has the sponsor's full support. The headteacher of Thomas Telford School acts as a mentor to the academy's Principal. The academy has accepted the 'Thomas Telford Template' which outlines best practice in several areas fundamental to school improvement.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors' understanding of the academy and its challenges has improved over the last year. They are now fully aware that student achievement is unacceptably low and are holding the academy's leaders to account through performance management. Previously, governors were overly reliant on information provided by senior leaders and they were not adequately carrying out their responsibilities. Governors are now more aware of specific issues to address, including the need for more detailed information on the impact of pupil premium funding. Training is planned to ensure governors have an increased understanding of student performance data.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135685
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	427171

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	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	980
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Harbourne
Headteacher	Paul Halcro
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2012
Telephone number	0115 915 9750
Fax number	0115 975 4888
Email address	info@bulwellacademy.co.uk

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