

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9153
Direct email: naik.sandhu@serco.com



6 June 2014

Paul Halcro
Principal
The Bulwell Academy
Squires Avenue
Nottingham
NG6 8HG

Dear Mr Halcro

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Bulwell Academy

Following my visit with Trevor Riddiough, Her Majesty's Inspector, and David Martin, Additional Inspector to your academy on 4–5 June 2014, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement 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.

The academy may appoint three newly qualified teachers in mathematics, English or physical education before the next monitoring visit.

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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham City and the Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- 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 students' 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.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4–5 June 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed 25 parts of lessons, of which 12 were jointly observed with senior leaders, and three tutor periods. Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also interviewed two members of the governing body who represented the joint sponsors, Thomas Telford School and The Edge Foundation. Four groups of students were involved in meetings with inspectors in addition to informal discussions. A number of documents were scrutinised including the updated improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, current assessment information, teaching and learning reviews, records of behaviour and attendance, and external reports. Inspectors reviewed samples of students' work from different subjects and year groups.

Context

Since the last inspection five teachers have been appointed, including heads of both mathematics and science. Eight teachers will leave the academy by the end of the summer term. Following the external review of governance, a new clerk to the governing body was appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academy has ensured greater accuracy of internal assessment data through the involvement of subject specialists from the Thomas Telford family of schools. The current projections for Year 11 suggest that results in English and mathematics will improve this year with a higher proportion of students making and exceeding the progress expected. Rates of progress are stronger in English than mathematics. The attainment gap between students eligible for pupil premium funding and those who are not is narrowing. However, the gap in performance between boys and girls remains too wide. Records of progress across subjects in Year 7 and 8 show improved rates of progress compared to previous years.

These improvements have been supported by a number of important actions. The tracking of progress now involves all subjects and year groups. Challenging key stage targets are set with interim milestones to check on progress over six assessment points. This process is not yet sufficiently refined, particularly for younger students who have been successful in meeting the challenging targets set. A data pack for each teaching group includes students' prior attainment from Key Stage 2, targets for each assessment point, and an evaluation of progress over time. Information is provided about students who have additional learning needs for each class. A high priority has been given to ensuring that teachers understand and make use of the data pack for lesson planning. Visits to lessons during the visit confirmed

the consistency with which teachers are using the packs to increase the level of challenge in lessons.

Assessment points are now used routinely to monitor how well students are progressing. Teachers are using this information to identify the support required if students are falling behind, although this aspect is less well developed. The impact of these actions has been to strengthen the accountability of teachers for students' progress across the academy.

There has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of marking and feedback since the inspection. The use of a marking stamp provides a structure for teachers' feedback. Students are now expected to respond to teachers' comments. This is particularly successful when the teacher sets a short task to consolidate, check or extend students' learning to be completed in the lesson. Students say that they like receiving feedback in this way and most, but not all, respond to the comments.

The quality of teaching

There has been some improvement in the quality of teaching, reflecting the positive impact of the training provided for staff. Good teaching is more prevalent and some teaching is outstanding. Leaders are tackling pockets of weaker practice which is evident from lesson observations and reviews of progress. A common lesson plan is in use, and this is helping staff to consider the key elements needed for good or better learning. For example, almost all plans include the outcomes expected from students by the end of the lesson. There is a sharp focus on establishing students' starting points and reviewing progress so that they are clear about what they have learned in each lesson.

The tracking system is widely used by teachers to plan their lessons so that they are at the right level of difficulty. This information also gives a clear picture of students' progress in each class. The wider use of this information by class teachers is beginning to have a positive impact on raising the achievement of their students.

Where learning was most effective, some common strengths observed included teachers' ability to plan and deliver lesson activities that promote good progress for students of all abilities through different work and approaches. For example, in a science lesson, students of lower ability were supported in their written work with a writing framework. In a Year 7 French lesson, students of higher ability were provided with more challenging work to stretch them even further. In some lessons, careful consideration of the grouping of students helped them get the most out of collaborative activities. Teachers' questions challenge students to think more deeply and draw out considered responses. Well-chosen resources and activities, such as a two-dimensional puzzle in a Year 10 science lesson, captured students' interest. In a number of lessons, opportunities to assess their own work and that of their classmates increased students' understanding of what was required to succeed.

Where learning is less effective, teachers expect too little of students, and fail to capture their interest or engage them in their work. The work is often too easy or too hard. As a result, students make little progress and become easily distracted, which can lead to poor behaviour in class.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour in lessons remains inconsistent. It is directly linked to the quality of teaching and teachers' expectations of students. In classes where teachers show high expectations, students respond promptly to instructions and listen carefully. During this inspection students in some classes and form periods showed poor attitudes to learning. Some students choose to talk rather than complete their work, or do not pay attention when the teacher is talking to the class. Teachers do not use the academy's system for managing disruptive behaviour consistently well. The behaviour policy has been revised with clear guidelines set for students and staff to support greater consistency, supported by training.

Students told inspectors that they feel safe in the academy. Not all students spoken to felt confident that reported incidences of bullying are resolved. The inspectors reviewed the academy's work in this area. This showed strong systems to monitor and analyse incidents of bullying, and appropriate contact with parents and carers. Follow-up checks take place for students who have been victims of bullying. Strong pastoral support is available. However, students spoken to did not demonstrate a good enough knowledge and understanding of different types of bullying. They were unable to recall opportunities for them to consider the impact of prejudice-based bullying or the importance of respecting the diversity represented in the academy and the wider community.

Systems to monitor and improve students' attendance and reduce persistent absence have developed well since the last visit, supported by an external review. This has resulted in an encouraging rise in the overall attendance rate. This remains well below the national picture and a challenge for the academy, particularly for older students. Attendance is closely monitored and analysed with routine follow-up. This is helping to raise the profile of attendance, supported by the rewards system. The impact of this is most noticeable in Years 7 and 8.

Staff are working hard to improve the learning culture in the academy. Expectations for behaviour have been raised since the inspection; a stronger approach is taken to tackle students' use of inappropriate language. This has led to an increase in exclusions but the number of students removed from classes has reduced over the academic year. Patterns of misbehaviour are closely tracked and analysed to inform support plans for students. Leaders make good use of parental surveys to monitor the views of parents. These show a good level of confidence in the academy's work.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Following the previous visit the improvement plan was rapidly revised to include milestones to check on progress, and the involvement of governors, in response to the inspector's feedback. The plan has been used effectively by leaders at all levels to direct improvement activities. It is not yet sufficiently refined to ensure that the evaluation of actions taken provides clear messages about the impact on the achievement of different groups of students, or improvements in teaching, behaviour and attendance.

Monitoring of lessons has been at the forefront of leaders' work and considerable efforts have been made to strengthen teaching and learning. A comprehensive training programme is being provided for all teachers. Staff skills have been assessed. Those who have the skills to teach effectively have been identified and their good practice is shared. Those who require additional help receive targeted support and individual coaching. The performance of all staff is closely checked and monitored. Leaders acknowledge that in the past, there has been more emphasis on general staff training than on tailored support and individual coaching. They intend to redress this balance in the coming months.

A number of lessons during this monitoring inspection were observed jointly with two senior leaders to confirm their assessment of effective and less than effective practice. Agreement was reached between senior leaders and inspectors on the impact of teaching on learning and progress in these lessons. The use of the 'teacher scorecard' has become an effective strategy for collating evidence from monitoring activities and for identifying development needs. The programme of 'learning walks' conducted by senior leaders is helping to raise the expectations of staff and students. These visits have been instrumental in securing consistency in the use of data packs and the common approach to lesson planning. Regular dialogue about students' progress between teachers, heads of department, senior leaders and governors has resulted in a shared commitment and drive for improvement across the academy.

Systems to assess, track and monitor the progress of year groups, and different groups of students in all subjects, is now fully established. This is informing a range of support strategies and changes to the curriculum. Greater emphasis is placed on the development of literacy skills on entry with specific programmes for identified students. The impact of the reading programmes on accelerating reading ages is evident with significant gains being seen in a relatively short time. A whole-school literacy drive is also underway where specific areas of literacy are developed such as the use of key words or the use of uniform strategies to develop extended writing. It is too early to measure the success of this initiative. Special 'panels' meet to review the progress of specific groups, such as those eligible for pupil premium funding, to monitor progress from entry to the academy. This is providing a sharper focus on the barriers to learning to close gaps in achievement between different groups.

Systems to monitor attendance and behavioural incidents have been strengthened. Targets are set for each term although these are not set out clearly enough in the improvement plan. Revised systems for managing low-level disruption are yet to be fully embedded. Senior leaders conduct learning walks each lesson to reinforce expectations.

The external review of governance has been used effectively to utilise the skills and expertise of individual governors, supported by training. The review has encouraged a greater presence in the academy for members of governing body. Opportunities are planned for them to meet staff and students and to see the results of new initiatives, such as the marking and feedback policy. Minutes of governors' meetings indicate that they regularly challenge leaders to account for differences in performance between groups of students and subjects. Particular attention is given to the use of pupil premium funding and the difference it is making. Governors have a good awareness of the issues facing the academy in tackling the legacy of underachievement, particularly for older students. They are clear about the need to tackle current priorities, but not at the expense of shaping a vision for the academy that will strengthen the transition of students into the world of work.

The academy continues to place a high priority on safeguarding, and to work with external support agencies to meet the complex needs of identified students. Appropriate checks are made on new members of staff.

External support

Following the previous visit governors acted quickly to commission a series of subject reviews from specialists across the Thomas Telford family of schools. This has proven to be an effective strategy for verifying the accuracy of assessment, the quality of schemes of work in meeting the needs of students, the quality of teaching, and the impact of marking and feedback. Reports and recommendations have been used to develop the capacity and confidence of leaders, and to provide external validation for the governing body. This approach has been confirmed for the next academic year to embed improvements.

External reviews of leadership and management, and the systems and procedures to improve attendance, have provided helpful feedback on the impact of recent changes. Links with local secondary schools are used to share and develop good practice; this includes a focus on the use of pupil premium funding.

The academy has made good use of data to show students' progress over time, and to analyse the quality and impact of teaching and middle leadership to inform staff training programmes.