

Serco Inspections  
Colmore Plaza  
20 Colmore Circus Queensway  
Birmingham  
B4 6AT  
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T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 0121 6799154  
Direct email: aidan.dunne@serco.com



Mr 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 Deirdre Duignan, Her Majesty's Inspector, Karen Adriaandse, Her Majesty's Inspector and Colin Lower, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7–8 October 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2013. 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham, The Education Funding Agency (EFA) and The Department for Education (DfE) Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter has been copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in (insert month and year)**

- 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 third monitoring inspection on 7-8 October 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed a range of lessons across the curriculum in both the main school and the sixth form. Academy evaluation documents were scrutinised, including assessment data, improvement plans and external review reports. Groups of students were interviewed formally and spoken with informally in lessons. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors observed students on a trip to a careers fair. A scrutiny of students' workbooks was carried out with the Principal. Meetings were held with a range of staff and other stakeholders, including members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, careers advisers, the Chair of the Local Governing Body (the nominee of The Edge Foundation, the sponsor) and a representative of the co-sponsor, The Thomas Telford School. During the monitoring inspection a special focus survey was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors on the quality of careers education and guidance provision by the school.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring visit three members of staff have left the academy. Two newly qualified teachers and one experienced teacher were appointed from September 2014. In August, the local governing body set up a curriculum, standards and achievement committee.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The 2014 examinations results were a great disappointment to academy leaders; predicted grades fell very short of actual results, despite a range of moderation exercises carried out last year. The current threshold result of 29% 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics represented a nine percentage points decline from last year. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement is wide and remains a serious concern; 18% of boys and 45% girls achieved 5+ GCSEs at A\*-C including English and mathematics. The progress and attainment of students in mathematics is inadequate. Whilst attainment in English remains below national averages, the overall progress made by students from most of their different starting points is improving towards national expectations. However, the progress of most-able students, across the academy, is not improving fast enough. Most other subjects, while below national averages, improved their attainment compared to last year, although results in science and art remain too low. Current achievement in Year 11 is more positive, with considerably more students on track to meet national expectations than last year.

The academy's literacy strategy has had a significant impact on the progress of Year 7 and 8 students. Students in Year 7, entering the academy with attainment in

English below national expectations, make rapid progress, as a result of discrete support lessons and specific programmes of study. The overall progress of students with special educational needs and disabilities make faster progress than their peers in both English and mathematics; in 2014, 75% of students with disabilities and special educational needs made expected progress in English, and 60% in mathematics. This represents a considerable improvement compared to last year.

Academy leaders have worked hard to improve the progress of those disadvantaged students who are eligible for pupil premium funding. The gap between these students and other students is narrowing, year on year, in both mathematics and English; they are making faster progress towards national expectations than those who are not eligible for the funding. This represents a significant success for the academy in their aim to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students.

The progress of current students seen in lessons and in their workbooks remains variable across the academy. Expectations of boys' achievement and that of the most able is not always high enough. Academy leaders are aware of this and have put together a robust strategy to tackle these issues.

Achievement in sixth form remains variable. In the 2014 examinations there was an increase in the numbers of students achieving at least one A level at A\*-E, and there were some improvements in individual subjects. Students taking the BTEC Level 3 certificate in business achieved well, as did those taking the BTEC Extended Diploma in health and social care. The numbers of students in the sixth form remain low; an analysis of recent examination results show that there is no specific underachievement of any particular group of students.

## **The quality of teaching**

The work of academy leaders to establish rigorous quality assurance systems means that teaching continues to improve, both in the main school and the sixth form. A common set of whole school non-negotiable expectations has led to teachers becoming more consistent in their practice. Most teachers plan their lessons meticulously, taking into account the individual needs of students and their prior attainment. Learning outcomes are now almost always differentiated according to ability. However, despite this, inconsistencies remain, and teachers do not always have high enough expectations for groups of students, particularly boys and the most able. Where there is excellent practice, teachers use assessment information carefully to identify students who have gaps in their understanding and prepare bespoke intervention to help them catch up.

The quality and consistency of marking and feedback of students' work has improved. Students say that they value the frequency of marking and opportunities to correct mistakes and improve their work. Academy leaders have identified that

the quality of students' responses needs to be developed further; some teachers illicit better quality responses from students because they set 'challenge' questions after they have marked work enabling students to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Teachers of Key Stage 4 are improving the way they are preparing students for closed examinations by frequently testing in controlled conditions. Ensuring that the marking and feedback of these tests is accurate, remains a key challenge for the academy.

The policy of homework and other opportunities to extend knowledge and skills outside the classroom is not well-developed. Students report that some teachers do not set homework regularly. The mathematics department has made use of new technologies to make homework interesting.

The quality of personalised care and guidance given to students with disabilities and special educational needs is a strength of the academy. The provision in the specialist unit for students with autism provides a highly effective environment so that students can thrive. Nurture groups, designed to support the most vulnerable students in the academy, are successful because they all make progress.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The academy leaders' approach to improve the attendance and punctuality of students is highly successful. Current attendance stands at 94.7% compared with 89% for the same time last year. The proportion of those students persistently absent from school (missing 15% or more sessions) has also reduced significantly. This success is testament to the focused and relentless strategy adopted by leaders. They have drawn upon the support of local groups, found new ways to engage with parents and implemented a clear rewards and sanctions policy.

Incidents of poor behaviour are reducing. Teachers are much more consistent in applying the behaviour policy and this was confirmed by students, who report that behaviour in lessons and around the school is much improved. The academy's strict policy on uniform means that students are nearly all smartly dressed and represent the academy well. Electronic systems to monitor behaviour in lessons is used effectively by academy leaders to track and identify patterns of poor behaviour. Well-tailored support plans are developed to ensure that students who persistently breach the code of conduct do not reoffend. Behaviour has also improved because the quality of teaching has improved across the academy. Inspectors witnessed very few incidents of poor behaviour in lessons; attitudes towards learning were generally positive, although boys displayed more off-task behaviour than girls.

Incidents of bullying are tracked and monitored closely. Students told inspectors that while they were confident that staff deal with the perpetrators, they were concerned that name-calling sometimes continues. Academy leaders are aware of this and plan to address these issues further through one to one mentoring sessions and the new personal, social and health programme of study.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Academy leaders, governors and sponsors have carried out an in-depth analysis of the reasons for the unexpected downturn in students' performance following the 2014 examination results. They have used this information to re-shape their improvement plan; for example, there is specific staff training emphasis on improving the achievement of boys and the most able students. The Thomas Telford family of schools' support has contributed significantly to the improved quality of teaching across the academy. The programme of continuous professional development remains a strong feature of academy improvement planning.

Highly-developed systems are now in place to monitor and track the quality of teaching. Subject leaders gather a range of evidence to support the self-evaluation judgements of their departments and they monitor the work of their teams closely. The information gathered is used increasingly more effectively to tackle underperformance of teachers and identify underachievement of groups of students quickly. Lessons have been learned from the disappointment of the 2014 examination results, especially by the subject leaders of English, mathematics and science. New plans, to prepare students more effectively for unseen examinations, are underway and leaders are currently exploring new ways to ensure that teachers' assessment of students' achievement are more accurate.

Senior leaders have already demonstrated a positive track record of successful leadership of the behaviour and safety of students and the pupil premium strategy. Student outcomes in these areas have improved rapidly; they now compare favourably with the national picture. The special educational needs coordinator has provided skilled leadership to the academy; care and support for students with disabilities and special educational needs is a strength of the academy. Early identification of students with additional learning needs, and carefully targeted intervention, mean that they make rapid learning gains. A staff survey carried out during the inspection, showed an overwhelming support for the leadership team and their strategies to drive improvement in behaviour and the quality of teaching.

The curriculum offer to students at Key Stage 4 is improving; more emphasis on academic subjects is meeting the needs of the most able students by allowing them to pursue courses which will lead to advanced level courses. The Principal has driven a new and innovative approach to delivering the personal, social and health curriculum across the school. The programme of study is coherent across all year

groups and, while it is still in the development stage, aims to address key issues pertinent to different year groups. Consequently, tutor time is used more effectively. The lead inspector observed engaging sessions for Year 9 students on relationships, led by external professionals.

A newly-appointed Vice-Principal of the sixth form is taking effective action to raise standards and has identified key priorities to improve sixth form provision. This includes offering academic qualifications from September 2014, and ensuring that the quality of teaching in the sixth form is monitored as rigorously as it is lower down the school. Leaders recognise that improving the attendance of sixth form students will be key to raising their achievement, and have put in place strategies that have been successful in improving the attendance of students in the main school. The sixth form 'contract' encourages students to commit to improving their attendance, standards of dress and attitudes to learning. It is too early to measure the impact of these new policies.

The academy's strategy for meeting its duty to provide careers guidance is incomplete. It focuses well on supporting students in Years 10 and 11 onto further education and training at the end of key stage 4 and those in the sixth form to higher and further education. However, students in Years 8 and 9 have insufficient careers guidance to help them make informed choices about their options for GCSE. Provision to inspire all students and raise their awareness of the careers pathways available is weak. Arrangements for evaluating the quality of the academy's careers guidance provision are not fully effective.

The academy provides effective individual support for the majority of those at risk of becoming NEET and uses a thorough system for prioritising students for individual careers guidance in Years 10 and 11, based on their attendance, achievement and attitudes. Employers support the well-designed programme in employability and this programme and the mentoring scheme are effective in re-engaging students. Systems for identifying and tracking students at risk of being NEET are thorough. All students on the special programme for those with autism or on alternative provision progressed successfully.

Since the 2014 examination results were published, governors, have acted quickly to form a focused committee to oversee the standards and achievement in the academy. The Chair of the Governing Body is experienced and knowledgeable; he provides the right level of challenge and support to school leaders. Keen to ensure sustained improvement of the outcomes for students eligible for pupil premium funding, he has also commissioned an additional external review of the strategy. Governors regularly visit the school to gain first-hand evidence of the work of the school. They have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are secure and monitored closely.

## **External support**

The academy continues to receive regular and bespoke support from the co-sponsor, the Thomas Telford School. Subject leaders value the support they have received from their counterparts in the family of schools, to improve their monitoring work. Regular moderation exercises to standardise students' assessments take place. Academy leaders have also commissioned a number of external reviews, for example, of behaviour and safety, which have provided helpful feedback on the effectiveness of their strategies.