

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

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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



6 March 2015

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 Amanda Carter-Fraser, Her Majesty's Inspector and Stephen Daniels, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4–5 March 2015, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place 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 newly-qualified teachers.

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, The Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Department for Education (DfE) Academies Advisers' Unit.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly

## Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:  
[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- For academies [[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)]
- The lead and team inspectors.

## **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 fourth monitoring inspection on 4-5 March inspection**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed 23 lessons, and made shorter visits to classrooms and small group intervention sessions. Many observations were jointly carried out with senior leaders. Inspectors met with a range of academy staff including: the Principal and Vice-Principals, subject leaders, pastoral leaders, the coordinator for personal, social and health education (PSHE), the head of sixth form, governors and representatives of the sponsors. Groups of students were interviewed across the main school and sixth form. Inspectors spoke informally with students and observed their behaviour during lunch and break times and between lessons. Inspectors also carried out a scrutiny of students' work. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including: the latest students' assessment data, the updated school improvement plan, external reviews, minutes of governing body meetings, action plans for mathematics and PSHE, behaviour and attendance logs, and intervention records for special educational needs students.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, in October, a number of staffing changes have taken place. Two English teachers, including the head of department, one information technology teacher and one science teacher, have left the academy. The academy has recruited three academic coaches for the English department and one academic coach for the mathematics department. A deputy head of the science department and one English teacher have commenced employment at the academy. The Chair of Governors stepped down as chair and took up post as the vice-chair. The previous Vice-Chair of Governors is now the chair.

The lead inspector considered the progress made in addressing the key recommendations that were identified in the previous inspection report, with the exception of the one relating to tutor time. This is because no tutorial sessions took place during the inspection.

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

The academy has invested a lot of time in ensuring that teachers' assessments of students' work are accurate and reliable. As a result, the latest early entry examination results for mathematics and English, were very close to the predicted outcomes by subject leaders. The latest students' assessment check, at Key Stage 4, shows a very promising upward trend for nearly all subject areas. Those students predicted to achieve five or more A\*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is set to improve considerably compared to last year. Attainment in both mathematics and English has improved. Student outcomes in most other subject areas are set to improve compared to 2014. The proportion of students predicted to make expected and more than expected progress in English is near to national averages. Students'

progress in mathematics is rapidly improving, although those set to make more than expected progress is still too low. In addition, the middle attaining students in mathematics are not making sufficient progress. The most able are currently on track to make progress broadly in line with national averages in both mathematics and English. Of all the English Baccalaureate subjects, history is of most concern because attainment in this subject is not improving as fast as in other subjects. In addition, the most-able students in history and science are not making as much progress as they should.

Work undertaken by academy leaders to tackle inequalities in achievement, is making a difference. Boys' progress and achievement has dramatically improved. Boys' attainment is rising at a faster rate than girls' attainment but the achievement gaps between them, in both mathematics and English, while closing year on year, remain wide. Students eligible for pupil premium funding continue to make rapid progress towards national expectations in both English and mathematics. Attainment gaps between these students and others in the school remain wide because non-pupil premium students are also making vast gains but, the attainment gap between pupil premium students and other students nationally is narrowing. Academy leaders have taken comprehensive and effective steps to address the considerable challenge of having over 60% of students on roll who are disadvantaged. Students with disabilities and special educational needs continue to make good progress because of the high level of support and care they receive.

Literacy and numeracy intervention strategies at Key Stage 3 are making a difference. In Year 8, 96% of students have made expected or more than expected progress in English. Those students in Year 7 receiving specific reading intervention have improved their reading age by six to eight months since September. Students receiving numeracy support are also making rapid progress.

Nearly all students in the sixth form are on track to achieve their target grades, apart from those studying sociology. One reason for the improved progress is because students are now placed on appropriate courses. Of greatest concern in the sixth form, is the very poor pass-rate among those students re-taking their GCSE English and mathematics. No-one in Years 12 or 13 has passed these GCSEs at grade C or above, although all have improved by at least 1 grade. Two students in Year 13 now depend on their success in these GCSEs in the summer examinations, to gain a place at university. Academy leaders are aware of this serious situation and have deployed extra intervention support with academic coaches.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching continues to improve at each monitoring visit. Academy leaders have successfully eradicated any inadequate teaching, as a result of the teacher development opportunities and astute staffing decisions. The strengths in the quality of teaching observed by inspectors include: skilful questioning, consistent

and meaningful feedback to students, careful planning using students' assessment data, strong subject knowledge used well to engage learners, and excellent use of additional teacher support. Where marking and feedback was the most effective, teachers conveyed subject-specific next steps for improvement and used challenging questions to further deepen knowledge and understanding. However, not all teachers' marking is at this high level. The quality of teaching in mathematics and English is becoming consistently strong. In mathematics, academy leaders acknowledge that there is still insufficient specific teaching of problem solving and applying mathematical skills at Key Stage 4, despite weaknesses identified in this aspect of the 2014 examinations. Literacy teaching across the curriculum is not embedded fully. Most subjects reference key words to students but there is not a whole school consistent approach to writing.

The academy's focus on progress for all has ensured that individuals who are identified as underachieving or who require additional support, receive extra intervention lessons promptly. Teachers, teaching assistants and academic coaches have a deep knowledge and understanding of individual needs, making learning more effective. Students say that they receive a high level of support, care and guidance from staff. The leaders of special educational needs have provided good training and guidance for staff to help them plan appropriate learning activities. Students say that they value the extra support and guidance given during the range of after-school sessions, including the Saturday sessions. These sessions are well-attended.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved. Strong subject knowledge by teachers has encouraged better engagement and achievement. The students who attend regularly, enjoy their studies, including the range of enrichment study programmes, and make steady progress.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The behaviour and conduct of students is now a significant strength of the school. Academy leaders have rightly prioritised consistently high expectations of behaviour. Inspectors witnessed hardly any low-level disruption to lessons. Students in the upper years confirmed that behaviour is typically good in lessons, while younger students in Year 7 say their lessons are sometimes disrupted by a small number of individuals. Academy leaders are aware of this and have taken urgent steps to address this behaviour. Inspectors noted that most students in lessons displayed a high degree of engagement and interest in their learning.

Fixed term exclusions have dramatically reduced compared to last year. The number of days students have lost to exclusions has significantly reduced by 75% compared to 2014. The academy now uses a greater range of preventative and support strategies to ensure that exclusions are only necessary in the most serious of cases. The Principal and governors took bold action to maintain high standards of

behaviour by permanently excluding a small group of students last term. Incidents of poor behaviour and disruption to learning across the academy have dramatically reduced as a result. Incidents of prejudice-based bullying, including homophobic and a race-hate bullying, have reduced significantly compared to previous years. These incidents are now rare. The curriculum and consistently reinforced expectations by teachers have contributed to improved attitudes. Students feel safe in the academy. Nurture groups are used successfully by the academy to enable vulnerable students to access mainstream academy provision.

Attendance across the academy has dramatically improved compared to the low figures from previous years. Overall absence and persistent absence rates are rapidly moving towards national averages. However, the attendance of students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is still too low. Poor attendance at these key stages puts students' achievement at risk. The attendance team is focused and determined and continues to work hard to improve the attendance of a core group of students. They use a range of effective incentives and sanctions strategies, including engaging with parents regularly and imposing fines.

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

The Principal, supported by an able team of senior leaders, has brought about significant improvements to the academy. His high expectations and a relentless focus on high quality teaching and learning, have contributed to successes so far. Self-evaluation at all leadership levels is accurate and founded upon robust monitoring and evaluation activities. Weaknesses are addressed quickly and support strategies are wide-ranging. Consequently, achievement, teaching and behaviour have improved significantly. Teachers benefit from a coherent and effective continuous professional development programme. External support is utilised strategically to ensure that the curriculum is fit for purpose and students' assessments are reliable and accurate. In addition, subject leaders have strengthened their leadership by working closely with external good and outstanding practitioners and advisers from the co-sponsor's family of schools.

The leadership of special educational needs is strong. Practice to improve the outcomes for disabled students and those with special educational needs is well regarded locally. Monitoring and evaluation activities are robust. Teaching assistants are trained and deployed well. Pastoral teams work well to monitor and track students' behaviour and achievement. They have a good understanding of individual students' needs, which has contributed to improved outcomes, conduct and attendance for many students. The coordination of personal, social and health education across the academy is at the early stages of development. Plans to develop and improve tutor time are in place, although monitoring and evaluation activities identified in the plan are not detailed enough. In addition, the criteria used to evaluate the plan's success are not sharp. Leadership of the sixth form is secure.

Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of sixth form achievement and behaviour.

Governors and sponsors are committed and experienced. They have invested significant funds to ensure that staffing is stabilised in the academy. In addition, they have supported innovative approaches to improve teaching and learning, such as employing academic coaches drawn from the pool of good graduates from local universities. Early indications suggest that this strategy is proving to be successful. Governors continue to challenge leaders robustly. However, this year they have not gained as much first-hand knowledge and experience of the work of the academy, through visits, as they did last year. The governor-commissioned external report into the effective use of pupil premium funding has provided governors with clear areas for further improvement, to ensure that the provision to support eligible students is more effective.

### **External support**

Nearly all faculties have benefited from support from external practitioners drawn from the family of schools sponsored by The Thomas Telford School. The range of external advisers supporting departments, provide the governors with important validation evidence of the academy's work. The external review reports from quality assurance visits to the academy are detailed and helpful. The Principal ensures that he receives value for money for any external support received. Where support is no longer effective or useful, it is decommissioned without delay.