

CUL Academy

69 Aston Road North, Aston, Birmingham B6 4EA

Inspection dates

22–23 September 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and governors have not met their statutory obligations for safeguarding. They have not made sure that the appropriate checks have been carried out on everyone who requires them. Recruitment procedures are not rigorous or impartial. Some staff have not been trained in how to restrain students safely.
- A number of documents and policies are not specific to the academy, contain inaccurate information and are not fit for purpose, including some on the academy's website.
- Leaders have not used the wealth of information they have about teaching, students' progress and their personal development to work out what needs to be done to make these aspects of the academy's work better.
- The governing body has not held leaders to account or checked policies rigorously enough.
- Teachers' assessments of students' attainment are not always accurate. Teachers' predictions of the grades students were expected to get in their GCSE examinations for some subjects were much higher than the grades they actually got.
- Lessons do not always get off to a quick start. This slows students' progress.
- Not all students are making the strong progress that is needed to help them catch up.
- A number of students arrive late in the morning. Too many are away from school too often.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal, staff and governors share a strong commitment to helping students make positive changes in their behaviour and attitudes to learning in order to improve their life chances.
- Some students make marked improvements in their behaviour and attendance.
- Because teaching is organised to meet students' individual needs, many students improve the rate at which they make progress in their learning.
- The atmosphere around the academy is calm and orderly. Staff and students respect one another and relationships between them are positive.
- All students gained at least one qualification at the end of the summer term. All went on to further education, apprenticeships or training.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, leaders, managers and governors must put right the weaknesses in the academy's safeguarding procedures. They should:
 - make sure that a disclosure and barring service check is carried out for everyone who does not already have one, including temporary staff and members of the governing body, and that the required information is recorded on the academy's single central record
 - amend the policy for safer recruitment to include the following requirements: every interview panel must include one person who has been trained in safer recruitment; the names of all members of the interview panel are recorded; and any person on an interview panel may not supply a reference for any applicant for the post in question
 - make sure that those members of staff who have not completed training in the use of restraint do so as soon as possible
 - make sure that instances of the use of restraint are recorded in a bound book with numbered pages.
- Strengthen the impact that leadership, management and governance have on all aspects of the academy's work by:
 - making sure that all of the policies and other documents that guide the academy's work are based on accurate information that is specific to the academy, and that governors discuss and agree their content before they are published
 - analysing information about students' attainment, their personal development and the quality of teaching
 - presenting the information to governors so that they can hold leaders to account and decide, with senior leaders, where improvements are needed
 - amending the academy's improvement plan to include these priorities
 - checking that targets for improvement are challenging yet attainable
 - making sure that self-evaluation is accurate and based on robust evidence
 - reviewing the roles and responsibilities of staff, in particular those of senior leaders, to make sure that workloads are manageable
 - recruiting additional governors with suitable experience and the expertise to help drive the academy forwards
 - making sure that the website includes the information specified in the academy's funding agreement.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that students' progress improves by:
 - developing teachers' accuracy in assessing the levels students are working at and in making predictions about the grades they are likely to reach in external examinations, for example by checking their assessments with teachers at other schools
 - making sure that all lessons start promptly
 - insisting that teachers check that students are reading with understanding when they are reading by themselves
 - increasing the quantity and range of reading materials available to students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders have not made sure that the academy's procedures for safeguarding meet legal requirements and that safeguarding is effective. Leaders and governors point out that they have received conflicting advice from different bodies; however, the requirement for all governors of free schools to be checked with the disclosure and barring service is clearly set out in the Department for Education's document *Keeping children safe in education*.
- Procedures for recruiting, interviewing and appointing new staff are not robust. In the past, it has been possible for the same person to interview an applicant and write a reference for that applicant. Impartiality has not been assured.
- Until recently, staff members were not trained in the safe use of restraint, should this become necessary. Currently, not everyone has completed this training. In addition, records of the use of restraint are kept in loose-leaf folders and not in a bound book with numbered pages.
- At the time of this inspection a number of the school's documents, including some on the academy's website, contained inaccurate and inappropriate information. The website itself did not include information for parents about the curriculum and the qualifications available to students, as specified in the academy's funding agreement.
- The academy's draft plan for improvement is not based on a thorough and accurate appraisal of what is working well and what needs to improve. The information that is held on students' attainment, progress and aspects of their personal development, and on the quality of teaching, is not used to identify trends or to highlight strengths and weaknesses. As a result, targets in the improvement plan are unrealistic and, in some instances, not relevant to the academy. Self-evaluation is optimistic and insufficiently self-critical.
- Vacancies and staff absence mean that some staff, in particular some senior leaders, shoulder quite a heavy burden of responsibility. Not all have the necessary time to carry out what is expected of them.
- Teachers have been observed by leaders and fellow teachers in the classroom, as part of both their professional development and the formal management of their performance. The outcomes of these observations are not used to match future training to meet teachers' particular needs. Teachers and mentors are keen to develop their skills and improve their teaching. All staff have access to online training and they are able to complete units at their own pace. The Principal encourages staff to attend courses that will develop their leadership skills and enhance their career prospects.
- The Principal has high expectations of both staff and students. Students are expected to behave, to be respectful and to work as hard as they can. They receive the support and guidance needed to help them meet these expectations and to deal with any personal difficulties they have. As a result, the academy is a calm and orderly place, both in and out of lessons. The students look smart in their uniforms and the building is clean, bright and tidy.
- The curriculum has sufficient breadth but rightly emphasises English and mathematics. Students study up to eight subjects at GCSE level and there is a range of vocational options. As the academy's roll grows, the number of subjects is planned to increase. There is a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education and citizenship, both through discrete lessons that are taught by mentors and through frequent one-to-one sessions. These sessions help to improve students' understanding both of their responsibilities as citizens of modern Britain and the opportunities that are available to them.
- Students regularly visit local museums and the theatre, and travel further afield such as to the Houses of Parliament. These activities help strengthen students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to raise their aspirations.
- Leaders and staff are committed to giving all students the equality of opportunity to succeed. They challenge any discrimination or inappropriate language. Students and staff of all backgrounds get on well together.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The school's governance is not strong. Some governors do not play an active part, which means that the remaining few have many responsibilities.
 - Governors know that they have not held leaders sufficiently to account for the effectiveness of safeguarding and have not challenged leaders when they should have done. They have accepted too readily the information that has been presented to them, and have not looked closely enough at the

policies and procedures that underpin the academy's work. They are beginning to put this right and understand the urgency that is needed.

- As yet, staff have received no pay rises. The annual review of the Principal's performance has taken place, but none of the current governors were involved in setting the targets or reviewing performance and so cannot vouch for the rigour of the process.
- Governors oversee the academy's finances, but do not have the information about outcomes to judge whether the spending represents value for money.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teachers' assessments of what students know and can do are not always accurate. Their predictions for GCSE outcomes in some subjects did not match the actual results at the end of the academy's first year, and the academy fell short of what was expected. On the basis of the assessments, a small number of students took their mathematics GCSE in Year 10. They will have to resit the examination as the results were not as good as anticipated.
- The unreliability of assessments means that the academy cannot be sure that all students are making progress at the rate that is needed to help them catch up.
- Lessons do not always start as crisply or promptly as they should.
- Time is set aside every day for students to read. Although all students read a book, some do so without enthusiasm. Teachers do not always check that students have read enough or that they have understood what they have read. The academy does not have a wide enough range of stimulating and attractive reading materials, and there is no library or separate space for reading outside of classrooms.
- Teachers and mentors have good relationships with students in lessons. They expect students to respond to questions and to participate in all learning activities. Students typically meet these expectations and persevere with their tasks.
- Teachers give students work that is interesting, challenging and appropriate for their needs. This motivates the students to take part and develops their resilience. It also helps students make progress in their learning.
- Mentors help teachers to check students' understanding and support individuals with their learning. They take care not to intervene too much or provide students with the answers.
- Teachers mark students' work in accordance with the academy's policy and give feedback about what needs to be done next, both in writing and verbally. Targets in students' books help them to understand what they are aiming for. Students readily complete corrections when required.
- Teachers check that students read, spell, understand and use the technical vocabulary needed for the lesson and the subject. Where appropriate, they build in chances for students to read, write and use their mathematical skills in different subjects.
- Teachers give parents detailed reports on students' achievements. Parents also receive postcards celebrating students' good behaviour. Mentors regularly observe students in lessons and around the school at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Whenever students behave well or show good attitudes, they are praised and rewarded.
- Teachers and mentors have high expectations of students' behaviour both in lessons and around the academy. They are quick to challenge any inappropriate language and to stop situations escalating.
- A very small number of students in the school are in Year 9. These students are well supported in their learning. They are taught together in small groups or, when appropriate, they work alongside the older students.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is inadequate. This is because of the failings in safeguarding procedures.
- Students say they feel safe in the academy and that there is always someone to talk to straight away if there is a problem. They said that this helps them to deal with things quickly and move on.

- Personal, social and health education sessions, together with the mentoring programme, make a strong contribution to students' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Students mentioned discussions on gangs, knife crime, illegal drugs and cyber bullying as examples of topics linked to their safety. They said that poor behaviour or any form of bullying is rare at the academy.
- Students enjoy 'motivational Mondays' when they work with their mentors or listen to talks from successful local entrepreneurs, for example. This, together with visits to businesses, helps to raise their aspirations and understanding of what they might achieve if they work hard and develop appropriate skills.
- Students grow in confidence, resilience and self-esteem during their time at the academy. They learn to take responsibility.
- Staff are vigilant and look out for signs that students are unhappy or at risk in any way. They know what to do should they have concerns, for example that students are at risk of exploitation or radicalisation. Any concerns are carefully documented and followed up where necessary.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- Attendance is below average but is steadily improving. Some students make marked improvements to their attendance, and the academy uses a wide range of strategies to encourage and enforce better attendance. Some students are harder to reach and the number who are away from the academy too often is still higher than average.
- Too many students are late for the academy in the morning. They do not miss too much learning, however, because the academy operates a longer day than a typical school.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the academy. They are respectful to adults and respond readily to instructions. They move sensibly around the academy; when in lessons they stay there and get on with their work. They do not always show enthusiasm or eagerness to learn, but they concentrate and do what is required of them. At breaktimes, students are much more lively and energetic. Boys and a few girls play football, basketball or table tennis, or chat amongst themselves. Lunchtimes are calm and sociable times, helped in no small measure by the high-quality, home-cooked food that students thoroughly enjoy.
- There have been no exclusions this term.
- Students who are new to the academy this term have settled in quickly and are behaving well.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Students have typically fallen behind in their learning when they start at the academy because of disruptions to their education in the past. Many settle down quickly and begin to make progress, but this is not the case in all subjects and for all students. In relation to their starting points, about a third of current students are not making the swift progress required to close the gap and catch up to where they should be.
- Cohort and group sizes are very small. It is not possible to make meaningful comparisons with national averages for different groups and abilities because of this. The 2015 examination results were the first since the academy opened, so it is not possible to identify trends.
- All students gained at least one qualification in the 2015 examinations. Some did much better than this. A small number gained five passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Just over three quarters gained five GCSE passes at any level. For the majority of students, this represented good progress since they started at the academy. A minority, however, did not make good progress. A number of students also gained success in the vocational options they studied.
- The academy's assessments show that there was no substantial difference between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students in the academy last year.
- Students' reading and spelling ages are checked when they start at the academy, and are typically below or well below their chronological ages. Many students catch up quickly as a result of targeted interventions.
- Work in students' books is neatly presented and well organised. At this stage of the academic year, there was not enough work in students' books to judge how well students were progressing.

- Individual students' folders show that many make good progress in aspects of their social and personal development. Because all of the information is at an individual level, it is not possible to judge whether this is the case for all students.
- Good attention is given to guiding students to make appropriate choices for when they leave the academy. All of the students who left at the end of the summer term went on to apprenticeships, college or sixth form. Current students spoke of their aspirations and the alternatives that they are considering.

School details

Unique reference number	141126
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10007822

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	Pupil referral unit
School category	Alternative provision free school
Age range of pupils	13–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nathan Dodzo (interim)
Principal	Wayne Henry
Telephone number	0121 696 4800
Website	www.culacademy.co.uk
Email address	info@culacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- CUL Academy opened in September 2014. It is part of the City United Learning Trust. It admits students who have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion from schools in Birmingham and neighbouring local authorities. Some remain on the roll of their former school.
- The academy offers outreach support and mentoring services to a small number of students in two local schools.
- Most of the students are boys. Students come from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Over two thirds of the students are disadvantaged. The academy does not receive additional funding for these students.
- A small number of students have special educational needs.
- The interim Chair of the Governing Body took up his position at the end of the summer term, following the resignation of the previous incumbent.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with no notice.
- The inspection team held discussions with the Principal, senior leaders, other members of teaching and support staff and students. They met the Chair of the Governing Body and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. They spoke informally to other staff, students and a governor.
- Inspectors visited lessons and looked at students' work in their books. They also observed students at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, in particular those related to safeguarding. They scrutinised records of students' attainment and progress along with information about their personal development and their attendance and punctuality. They also examined case studies and files relating to individual students.
- There were no responses recorded on the Parent View website. The inspectors were unable to speak to parents during the inspection. The outcomes of a recent survey of the views of staff members were taken into account.

Inspection team

Linda McGill, lead inspector

Gwen Coates

Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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