

Bolton Wanderers Free School

Free School

Inspection dates

19–21 September 2016

Overall effectiveness		Inadequate	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate	16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate		
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate school

- The requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are not being met. Students do not have access to meaningful external work experience.
- A culture of low aspirations results in too many students making poor progress and not meeting their target grades.
- Many students do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable because too much teaching fails to challenge and inspire them.
- Students do not develop their English and mathematics skills well enough because teachers pay insufficient attention to these skills within the delivery of students' vocational courses.
- Students do not have sufficient access to independent and impartial careers guidance. They lack information on how to prepare for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Governors do not challenge senior leaders effectively or hold them to account for improving the provision.
- Quality assurance is ineffective in securing consistently high standards across the school.
- Managers do not use data to help bring about the required improvements to the poor quality of provision and students' low achievements.
- Failure to recruit sufficient numbers of students over the last three years has led to serious financial difficulty for the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Most students complete their course and pass their vocational qualifications.
- Students, particularly the most vulnerable, benefit from good pastoral support in dealing with a range of personal issues.
- Effective management strategies have resulted in a significant increase in attendance rates in the current year.

Full report

Information about the school

- Bolton Wanderers Free School is located at the Macron Stadium, the home of Bolton Wanderers Football Club, in Bolton. The school is located in the East Stand of the stadium with teaching accommodation in the corporate hospitality boxes. The school opened in September 2014. The ethos of the school is to develop the skills, confidence and qualifications of all young people, including the disadvantaged, to enable them to progress to positive destinations. The school provides a narrow range of 16 to 19 vocational study programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3 in sport, health and social care and public services.
- The proportion of young people in Bolton who achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including mathematics and English in 2014/15 is similar to the national average at 57%. Currently, a fifth of students enrolled at the school have previously achieved five GCSE grades A* to C including mathematics and English.
- Approximately one third of students have previously been eligible for free school meals.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Meet all requirements of the study programmes by providing meaningful external work experience opportunities and good-quality independent and impartial careers guidance for all students, to enable them to make informed choices about their next steps in education, employment or apprenticeships.
- Reverse the culture of low aspirations by setting challenging targets for students based on their starting points and developing their English and mathematics skills quickly, in order for them to make good progress and achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Raise aspirations by setting and monitoring challenging targets for managers and staff.
- Ensure that governors have sufficiently detailed information on students' outcomes and the quality of the provision, so that they are able to challenge leaders and monitor closely the impact of managers' actions on bringing about rapid improvement.
- Improve the management and use of data to enable leaders to evaluate the progress of different groups of students effectively, so that they can take effective action to improve outcomes.
- Strengthen quality assurance arrangements to ensure that leaders have a clear and detailed understanding of the quality of provision, so that good practice can be shared across the school and swift action can be taken to rectify all weaknesses quickly.
- Recruit sufficient numbers of students to ensure the financial viability of the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and managers are committed to the school's mission to develop the skills, confidence and qualifications of all learners, including the disadvantaged, so that they progress to their next stage in education, employment or training. The narrow curriculum of sport and health and social care was developed by the chairman of Bolton Wanderers Football Club and supported by Bolton local authority. Owing to demand and the need to increase student numbers, the school has diversified its provision and in the current year also offers programmes in public services. Managers have responded to low student outcomes in 2015/16 at level 2 by introducing a level 1 course in sport for current students who do not meet the criteria for a higher-level course.
- Managers have not met recruitment targets for each of the last three years, with the result that the financial future of the school is under serious threat; new strategic solutions are urgently required.
- Many urgently needed improvements in the quality of provision have not yet been achieved. The principal has focused on operational matters rather than strategic approaches. Targeted management interventions led to some improvements in students' attendance and students' outcomes in 2015/16, although students' outcomes remain too low.
- Appraisals for all staff, including teachers and support staff, are not robust or effectively monitored. Leaders do not adequately set or monitor aspirational targets for managers and staff. Most improvement planning by managers is lacking in specific targets and the regular reviews required for detailed monitoring of progress are not in place.
- Self-assessment is not used effectively to improve students' outcomes. The self-assessment report is too descriptive, overstates strengths and does not use evidence appropriately to inform judgements. The views of students and parents are not used sufficiently to inform or plan improvements in the school.
- The process for quality assurance is inconsistent. Leaders and managers fail to monitor the performance of programmes, which means that the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes, particularly students' access to meaningful work experience, are not met.
- Managers are unaware of the differences in the performance of groups of students and have yet to take action to improve their outcomes. The school liaises with the local mosque and local university to increase recruitment of under-represented groups, such as minority ethnic students and females. However, leaders are unable to establish the impact of this drive because of poor data management.

The governance of the school

- Governance of the school is ineffective. Although the team of experienced governors is wholly committed to the mission and future of the school, the school is in significant financial difficulty. Governors are working closely with the principal and other external agencies to find financial and strategic solutions to the school's financial plight.
- Reporting to governors by school managers is weak, which means that governors are not always sufficiently well informed about the quality of provision. The quality of reports to governors declined in 2015/16. Few reports to governors include detailed monitoring of progress towards agreed targets that would enable governors to provide informed

challenge and support. Too many reports are verbal and not included in governors' papers or minutes. As a result, governors are unable to challenge leaders sufficiently in order to hold them to account.

- Governors met only twice in 2015/16. They recognise that this is not frequent enough to challenge leaders effectively or monitor agreed actions for improvement in sufficient detail, given the poor outcomes for students.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff and students have all undertaken safeguarding qualifications and work is underway to record staff training as part of the single central record, for ease of monitoring.
- Staff responsibilities for safeguarding are clear and effective and links with external agencies are good. Managers recognise that they need to work more closely with local schools to access good transition information so that they can support all students, if they require it, from the point of enrolment onwards.
- Although the personal development programme followed by all students includes raising their awareness of risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, students nevertheless lack sufficient understanding of these risks. Staff and students do not have sufficient awareness of the risks associated with forced marriages or female genital mutilation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The school provides study programmes in three subject areas: sport, health and social care and public services. Teachers do not identify students' starting points, particularly in English and mathematics, precisely enough. All students complete tests in English, mathematics and vocational competencies at the start of their course, but teachers do not analyse test results in sufficient detail to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, learning programmes are not sufficiently well tailored to students' individual needs and starting points.
- Targets set by teachers to help students achieve their grades are neither aspirational nor specific enough; for example, students are told that their evaluations need to be better but not how to achieve this. As a result, too many learners make poor progress and do not develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need to meet or exceed their targets.
- Teachers in the current year have reviewed and amended current students' target grades. Target grades for students in the first year of their advanced-level course now reflect their starting points. However, the revised targets for second-year students are often unrealistic and occasionally impossible to achieve.
- Ineffective deployment of learning support assistants detracts from the quality and effectiveness of learning support and prevents those students who are in most need of additional help from making good progress.
- Teachers fail to assess students' progress in lessons sufficiently well. This issue was raised during an inspection monitoring visit in January 2016. Teachers do not use questioning skilfully enough to check and extend students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers frequently do not give students enough time to answer questions and often supply the answer themselves.

- Teachers fail to challenge and inspire students sufficiently. Classes contain students who have wide-ranging abilities and aspirations. Too frequently all students do the same work in lessons, irrespective of their ability. Where the work is too easy or too difficult for them, they lose interest and become bored; this contributes to their slow progress. In too many cases teachers fail to challenge low-level disruptive behaviour; this adversely affects students' progress.
- Students' concentration in practical activities is good and most students give their full attention to completing the tasks and make good progress. When students work in pairs or in groups in classes and during sports activities, they develop good team-working skills.
- Teachers' feedback on students' assessed work is not consistently clear or sufficiently constructive, which means that students do not always know what they need to do to improve. Too few students, including the most able, attempt to complete work at their target grade or a higher grade.
- Teachers do not review students' written work effectively on vocational courses. Students' written work often contains gaps where students do not have the knowledge or understanding to complete an answer. Incorrect information or spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are not identified or corrected. Consequently, students make repeated errors that impair the quality of their work. Too often teachers assess work as correct when there are errors and insufficient subject content.
- Vocational teachers give too little attention to the importance of students developing high-quality English and mathematics skills. Students do not receive enough guidance to help them to develop their oral skills.
- Many students enjoy their learning and are keen to progress. They appreciate the opportunities that the school provides for a new start and a fresh beginning, especially where they have not enjoyed their previous educational experiences. Staff treat students fairly and respectfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

- Pre-course guidance on the school's website and in marketing material lacks detail and entry requirements to courses are unclear. Teachers often ignore the agreed guidelines for student progression, allowing students to progress to higher-level courses without meeting the basic course requirements. As a result, students are ill prepared for their learning and struggle to meet their targets.
- Less than a quarter of students had access to external work experience in 2015/16. The choices of work experience placements are extremely limited and are mainly at Bolton Wanderers football stadium. The planning, coordination and evaluation of the impact of work experience in helping students plan for their future learning and employment are weak.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are poor. Students do not have ready access to impartial and independent careers guidance. Although the school invites local apprenticeship providers and universities to talk to students, the exploration of career and study options is superficial and happens too infrequently.
- Most students have positive attitudes to learning; however, low-level disruptive behaviour from a few students is evident in many lessons. Occasionally, students arrive to lessons without basic equipment such as paper and pens.
- Students report that they feel safe and know who to contact should they have any concerns or issues regarding their own safety or the safety of others. Although students

have received training in the 'Prevent' duty, they lack confidence in their understanding of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.

- Students, particularly the most vulnerable, benefit from good pastoral support in dealing with a range of personal issues. Communication with, and referral to, external agencies is good.
- Managers' actions to rectify low attendance have been successful and attendance in the current year is high.

Outcomes for learners

Inadequate

- Too many students, across all levels of study, make poor progress from their starting points. Leaders and managers recognised in 2015 that targets for students were not sufficiently challenging and swiftly amended these targets to reflect the progress students should be making relative to their starting points. However, almost half of students failed to meet either their original or new targets.
- The school's own achievement data for 2015/16 shows that too many students did not make the progress expected of them and failed to achieve the grades of which they were capable. This year, a few learners progressed to level 3 qualifications even though they had failed their level 2 qualification. Consequently, too many current advanced level students do not have the knowledge, skills or understanding to study at this level.
- Management of data is weak and, as a result, managers are unable to provide accurate and timely reports on students' progress. Consequently managers are unaware that the progress of many students is poor. The proportion of students who progress to a higher-level course is high, even though the vast majority only achieve a pass grade on their intermediate-level course.
- Leaders and managers collect achievement data for all students but do not analyse it sufficiently to identify accurately achievement gaps between different groups of students.
- Although leaders and managers collect data to track students' intended destinations, they do not systematically analyse data in order to evaluate the destinations of all students. Managers have insufficient information about the destinations of approximately one tenth of students.
- The proportion of students who remained on their courses increased significantly in 2015/16 and was high. Most students in 2015/16 stayed until the end of their programme and achieved their qualifications.
- Very few students achieved GCSE English and mathematics at grades A* to C in 2014/15. Although achievement improved in 2015/16, the proportion of students achieving GCSE English and mathematics at grade A* to C was still low. The school enters all students who have previously gained GCSE English and mathematics at grade D and a small proportion of students who achieved grades E and F. More than half of students improved their GCSE by at least one grade in English and a third of students achieved this improvement in mathematics.

School details

Unique reference number	141081
Type of school	Free school
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	95
Principal/CEO	Ms Toni Carr
Telephone number	01204 673 779
Website	http://bwfreeschool.ac.uk/

School information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	38	0	76	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the school receives high-needs funding	7							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the school contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Not applicable							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the school's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection monitoring report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the school.

Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathy Passant	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Jill Gray	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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