

Tribal  
Kings Orchard  
1 Queens Street  
Bristol, BS2 0HQ

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

**Direct T** 0117 3115307  
**Direct email:** rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com



4 December 2014

Mr D Neal  
The Interim Principal  
The Mirus Academy  
Leamore Lane  
Bloxwich  
Walsall  
WS2 7NR

Dear Mr Neal

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Mirus Academy**

Following my visit with Denah Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Colin Lower and David Shears, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 2 and 3 December 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 third 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 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 academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint any NQTs to the secondary phase.

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 Walsall, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely  
Sue Morris-King  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good for all pupils in all years by making sure that all teachers:
  - match work to the different ability levels in their class
  - use additional adults well to support pupils with special educational needs and other pupils needing additional support
  - give clear and specific feedback that helps pupils to understand how to improve their written work, and then make sure that pupils act on this advice.
- Ensure that all pupils make at least good progress so that the standards they reach, particularly in English and mathematics, by the end of Key Stage 4, are at least equal to national averages. Do this by ensuring that:
  - academy leaders recruit subject specialist teachers to any vacancies that exist or occur
  - teachers of English and mathematics use their skills and knowledge to provide specific and expert support to raise attainment in each year group
  - pupils in all year groups have consistently good opportunities to develop and then use their reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills in all subjects
  - pupils, particularly those in Years 7 to 11, are taught the skills necessary to be independent learners and then have the opportunity to use these skills in lessons.
- Improve pupils' behaviour so that it is consistently good or better in lessons and around the academy by:
  - implementing strategies to tackle the poor behaviour of a significant minority of older pupils and therefore reduce the number of exclusions from school to below the national average
  - making sure that all pupils experience teaching that engages and motivates them so that they have better attitudes to learning in lessons
  - making sure that all members of staff have high expectations of good behaviour in lessons and around the academy, that these are communicated clearly to pupils and that all teachers are consistent in their management of poor behaviour.
- Increase attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent to at least national averages by working with parents, carers and external agencies.
- Improve leadership so that it enables pupils to achieve well by:
  - improving the quality of teaching across all years and all subjects to at least good and making sure that all teachers appointed have the necessary subject knowledge
  - making sure that leaders of English and mathematics take responsibility for improving pupils' achievement in these two subjects in all years
  - ensuring that there are leaders in post who have the expertise, time and capacity to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across all phases in subjects other than English and mathematics

- consistently making judgements on the quality of teaching that take into account how well pupils are making progress over time
- tackling weaknesses in the provision for supporting pupils with special educational needs
- increasing the effectiveness with which leaders at all levels analyse the academy's work to identify what is working well and how improvements can be made
- leaders, including governors, making sure that the pupil premium funding is used to make a significant and sustained difference to the achievement of those groups of pupils it is intended to support
- making sure that the sponsor and governors only commission external support that provides accurate evaluations of the academy's position
- making sure that the independent external review of governance is completed quickly and that this review includes a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim Principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, two other governors and an additional representative of the sponsor. A telephone conversation was held with representatives of the Department for Education.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three senior leaders, eight teachers and 17 support staff have left the academy. Six teachers, one senior leader and 12 support staff have joined.

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

Achievement is improving steadily in the primary phase of the academy, but not in the secondary phase. The standards reached by the end of Year 11 have declined.

Children in nursery and Reception made better progress in 2014 than in 2013 and more children are now reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 remained significantly below the national average but improved in all aspects when compared to 2013. Significantly more pupils reached the expected level in the phonics screening check than in the previous year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 improved in reading and writing but dipped slightly in mathematics and in spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG). However published data show that in reading and writing the percentage of pupils making expected and more than expected progress exceeded the national averages. In reading and writing the gap in attainment between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and their peers have closed. Those eligible for free school meals made better than average progress compared to all pupils nationally. In mathematics, fewer pupils than average made expected progress, although slightly more than average made above-expected progress. A similar picture was seen in lessons and books during the inspection, where pupils were generally making steady progress but progress was weaker in mathematics than in other subjects.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2014 was exceptionally low when compared to last year's national averages, lower than it was in 2013 and much lower than the academy's own predictions. Only 17% of pupils gained five or more GCSEs or equivalent including English and mathematics. Around 30% gained fewer than five GCSEs at any grade and 11% of pupils did not gain any qualifications. These headline figures mask a huge variation in attainment in different subjects. There was widespread underachievement in English and mathematics – very low proportions of pupils made expected progress in either subject and hardly any pupils made more

than expected progress. Outcomes were poor in a range of other academic and practical subjects. In contrast, in a number of other subjects including science, sport and information and communication technology, well over 50% of pupils attained a GCSE or equivalent at grades A\*-C. A similarly polarised picture was seen in lessons and in pupils' books – sometimes pupils were making good progress over time and at other times progress was clearly inadequate.

Overall attainment in academic subjects in Year 13 fell slightly between 2013 and 2014. The average points score per entry, although slightly improved, continues to be broadly equivalent to grade U. Progress has improved slightly, but students continue to achieve about half an A Level grade below similar students nationally based on GCSE starting points. Year 13 attainment in vocational subjects remains significantly below average overall and students made less progress in vocational subjects in 2014 than in 2013. As with GCSEs, there is variation between the outcomes in different subjects. A considerable number of sixth form students in both Years 12 and 13 do not yet have GCSEs at grade C or above in English and mathematics.

### **The quality of teaching**

Improved teaching in the primary phase is leading to pupils making better progress over time in all key stages. Teachers plan their lessons carefully, making use of what they know about pupils' needs and skills. Pupils' learning skills and their skills in English and mathematics are developing steadily. Some weaknesses remain in the teaching of mathematics. There is no agreement about how different mathematical concepts will be taught, and teachers are not always clear about which method would best meet pupils' needs. This sometimes leads to pupils becoming confused and not making the progress they should. There is still no continuity between the teaching of phonics (the sound that letters make) in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 and there is no systematic teaching of phonics in Year 2. This affects the continuity of pupils' learning of this crucial reading skill. Senior leaders have ordered new materials to be used with all the younger pupils, which they intend to introduce imminently.

Teaching in the secondary phase is improving in some respects, but not quickly enough. There is still too much inconsistency in important aspects. For example, the marking policy is clear, but not everyone follows it. In some lessons, marking over time was cursory, with no comment about improvement. In contrast, some excellent marking was seen in history, where teachers clearly identified how the pupils could improve their work, and gave them time to respond at the start of each lesson. Pupils understood and appreciated this process, which was having a clear impact on their learning. In textiles, pupils responded well to their teacher's helpful comments, and also assessed each other's work. Marking in information and communication technology was equally useful.

Learning is adversely affected in some lessons in the secondary phase by too little focus on the subject matter, insufficient clarity about the desired learning outcome, or too little demand placed on the pupils by the teacher. Again, there were a number

of examples of the opposite observed – well-structured, carefully thought out lessons, with absolute clarity from the teacher about what they wanted the pupils to learn. Teachers had high expectations and set an appropriately demanding pace throughout. In these lessons, pupils' work indicated that this was the norm.

In mathematics in the secondary phase, the subject team has worked together to agree the best method to teach different concepts. This is potentially helpful for pupils who may move groups several times over the course of a key stage. However, teachers do not always keep to the agreed policy.

Younger and less able secondary pupils find it difficult to concentrate for the duration of the double lessons, which last for an hour and a half. This affects their learning as many become fidgety and distracted.

The academy has a number of pupils, both in primary and secondary, who speak English as an additional language. The approach to teaching these pupils is not always effective enough, particularly in the primary phase.

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

Behaviour during the inspection was largely calm, both in the primary and secondary phases. Occasional volatile outbursts, usually from younger secondary pupils, were managed well by pastoral support staff. These staff also provide useful support to teachers by helping to resolve situations and keep pupils in their lessons wherever possible. Primary pupils showed positive attitudes to their learning and tried hard to complete their work. This was also the case for many secondary pupils, although Year 7 pupils' learning skills are not well developed and many constantly seek reassurance from their teachers. Both primary and secondary pupils were polite and welcoming to visitors and all felt that behaviour at their academy has improved.

The rate of fixed-term exclusion has remained relatively low this term. This represents a considerable and sustained improvement over time. The academy has developed a range of suitable alternatives to exclusion. The intervention centre on the secondary site is proving successful in keeping pupils in school and reintegrating them into their lessons.

Attendance at the secondary site remains low but has improved by one percentage point this term compared to last term. Persistent absence is still very high but has fallen by about a fifth. Attendance at the primary site is now slightly above the national average. These improvements reflect the persistence shown by senior leaders and staff in emphasising the importance of attendance with parents, carers and pupils. Attendance in the sixth form is unacceptably low.

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

Leaders have refined the system for evaluating the quality of teaching. Better use is being made of assessment information, the work in pupils' books, and pupils'

perceptions to make judgements about teaching over time. There is a clear policy for the action that is taken when teaching requires improvement or is inadequate. Some of the support provided by senior leaders is proving effective. However, a number of teachers in the secondary phase require intensive coaching in order to improve and some subject teaching needs improvement in the primary phase. While there is good teaching in the academy, there is not enough of it to be able to release the best teachers from their classes to provide this support to their peers. Leaders have not been able to secure the support they need from other sources. There are also continued difficulties with recruitment to some teaching posts. Overall, improvements in teaching are not happening fast enough to secure the much-needed improvements in achievement.

The academy has introduced a new target setting and tracking system for Key Stages 3 and 4 and set new expectations for how and when teachers should assess pupils' progress. More use is being made of standardised assessments in Key Stage 4. Leaders are rightly using this assessment information to challenge teachers whose classes are underperforming. Targets are based on nationally expected rates of progress. However, where pupils in Year 7 join the academy below Level 3 in English or mathematics, Key Stage 2 teacher assessment is not being used to set targets, which calls into question the appropriateness of some of the targets. Too many teachers are not assessing the level of pupils' work accurately across Key Stages 3 and 4. Some training for teachers has begun and a small amount of external support has been secured to improve the accuracy of assessment, but this work is at an early stage.

Leaders have focused closely on raising attainment in Year 11. They have identified pupils who could achieve five A\*-C grades at GCSE but are currently underachieving. These pupils are attending additional teaching sessions for English and mathematics, according to their needs, each day. Their progress in other subjects is also being closely monitored. Parents and carers of these pupils were recently invited to an evening event at which senior leaders and staff spoke to them about how they could support their children. This event was well presented and well attended by parents and carers. There is currently less focus on those pupils who may not achieve five GCSEs at any grade. Leaders are also aiming to raise aspirations in other year groups. A successful industry morning for Year 8 was held on the first day of the inspection. Pupils worked well in teams to solve problems, and presented their work to the whole year group and visitors.

Leaders are monitoring behaviour and attendance more precisely, including attendance in the sixth form. This is enabling leaders and pastoral support staff to target their actions more effectively. Much-improved systems for monitoring attendance allow emerging issues to be identified and acted upon much more quickly.

Governors and the representatives of the sponsor have continued to provide the academy with challenge and with practical support. For example, they have been involved in managing aspects of the finance and building programme, speaking to

pupils in assembly in order to raise aspirations, and advising on monitoring teaching and learning.

### **External support**

The academy has insufficient external support and this is severely hampering its progress. The interim Principal has made a useful link with a Birmingham academy, to support with assessment and tracking. He has purchased a limited amount of support with assessment in English and mathematics. Both he and the sponsor have tried to broker other, more extensive, links to support the improvement of teaching but these have not yet been able to be put in place.