

Tribal
Kings Orchard
One Queen Street
Bristol
BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

4 March 2015

Mr D Neal
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 Aileen King and Cliff Mainey, additional inspectors, to your academy on 2–3 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth 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 NQTs in 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 Advisors Unit at the Department of 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 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
- 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 2–3 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Interim Principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, the Acting Chair of the Governing Body, two other governors and a representative of the sponsor. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the Department for Education. The inspection focused on the primary phase and on Key Stages 3 and 4. In the primary phase there was a particular focus on the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and mathematics. In the secondary phase the inspection concentrated particularly on mathematics, English and science. Provision and outcomes in the sixth form were not evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 10 teachers and two members of support staff have left the academy. Eight members of support staff have joined. There are several supply teachers working in the academy. The process has begun to transfer the sponsorship of the academy from the Walsall College Academy Trust to the Matrix Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement in the primary phase of the academy continues to improve. The majority of pupils are now making progress at least in line with nationally expected rates. A growing proportion are making good progress from their starting points. Progress in mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. As a result of this consistently improving progress, standards in reading, writing and mathematics in the primary phase continue to rise.

In the secondary phase, the academy continues to focus a great deal of time and energy on trying to ensure that a small group of targeted Year 11 pupils gain five A* to C grades at GCSE. However, as reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, not enough attention is being paid to ensuring that all pupils leave with at least five GCSE grades overall. The progress being made towards their target grades by Year 11 who are outside the targeted group is unclear. Attainment continues to be exceptionally low.

The progress being made by the rest of the year groups in the secondary phase is unclear. Assessment information is gathered on a half-termly basis but is not analysed well enough to show accurately the proportion of pupils who are making expected progress in different subjects. There is no analysis of the progress made by different groups of pupils, such as those with special educational needs or receiving

free school meals. Observations of learning in lessons and the work in pupils' books and folders indicate that progress remains very variable. Where pupils attend well, are taught well and apply themselves in lessons, they make reasonable or good progress. However, where pupils have had a series of temporary teachers or received weak teaching or their own attendance is low or behaviour poor, they make little progress. Too many pupils still fall into this latter group.

The quality of teaching

In the primary phase, good actions have been taken to improve the quality of mathematics teaching. Pupils in Key Stage 2 have been re-grouped for their mathematics lessons, according to their needs. Staff have worked in teams to plan the curriculum coverage across the year groups, which has resulted in greater consistency in teaching key mathematical concepts and skills. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Marking is accurate and evaluative, and pupils consistently respond to their teachers' comments by correcting or adding to their work. The teaching of phonics now has more continuity and progression. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are placed in suitable phonics groups. By the time they reach Year 2, many pupils are able to sound out and write appropriately complex words.

The overall quality of teaching in the secondary phase is being severely affected by gaps in staffing. This is also undermining the consistency and effectiveness of management of behaviour.

The quality of teaching in mathematics is being hampered by too much superficial coverage of topics rather than an approach which encourages a greater understanding of concepts. Mathematics schemes of work provide little opportunity to solve problems or to reason within mathematics, key skills which are essential for success in the new GCSE curriculum. Assessment is not fit for purpose because it is not being used well enough to diagnose gaps in learning in order to plan the next steps.

In English, assessment information has been used well to make some changes to the curriculum in Key Stage 3, particularly in Year 9, in order to ensure that pupils develop the skills they need for their GCSE work. The overall quality of teaching in English, as in many areas of the academy, is currently hampered by some gaps in staffing. Key stage leaders are working well to try to ensure that pupils do not fall behind in their learning but senior leaders are aware that urgent assistance is needed to ensure that all pupils complete coursework to the appropriate level and are well prepared for their examinations.

There is growing consistency in the teaching of science and this is having a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making. The science team have developed a robust system for assessing pupils' progress. Importantly, the science team

moderate their assessments of pupils' work with other schools so that teachers are confident in the accuracy of their assessments.

The development of literacy has stalled. Low levels of literacy continue to be a serious barrier to pupils' achievement.

In lessons visited during the inspection, the impact of questioning on pupils' learning was variable. In the best examples, teachers gave pupils enough time to reflect and targeted their questions well to individuals, encouraging them to expand on their answers, articulate clearly and demonstrate their understanding. This helped them to think and remain engaged in the lesson. Weaker use of questioning relied on pupils volunteering, leading to only a few pupils taking part and too many being passive.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the primary phase of the academy are good. Pupils are typically motivated to learn and engage well in their lessons. Their confidence is boosted by frequent praise and encouragement from staff. This means that they are happy to share their ideas, show they understand and take risks. Any potential disruption is handled well and pupils quickly respond. Social times are pleasant and pupils interact well. Incidents of negative behaviour are relatively rare and addressed swiftly. Attendance is slightly below the national average.

Behaviour and attitudes to learning in the secondary phase of the academy have deteriorated since the previous inspection. In several lessons visited, pupils were openly defiant and rude to staff or to each other. Boys in particular often found it difficult to pay attention for longer periods of time and created too much low-level disruption. Too many pupils arrived late to lessons and a few did not go at all. Some argued with staff when challenged. At one point during the first day of the inspection a number of Year 11 pupils smoked outside on the playground instead of going to their next lesson. The senior leaders' records and analysis of behaviour confirm that behaviour has worsened in recent months, particularly that of Year 11. Recorded incidents of poor behaviour have risen and the use of fixed-term exclusion in the first half of the term was nearly as high as in the whole of last term. In contrast, many secondary pupils remain polite and cooperative and interested in their learning. Pupils respond best where staff are completely overt about what they expect, communicate this clearly and consistently, praise good behaviour and efforts and challenge non-compliance as necessary.

Attendance in the secondary phase is low and persistent absence is very high. While the attendance of some pupils has risen since the previous inspection, the attendance of others has dropped.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The primary phase of the academy runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis and has continued to improve at a good rate. The vice-principal in charge of this phase has been very effective in promoting and securing improvement and is very well supported by the staff team. Middle leaders are becoming more confident and effective in their roles.

The secondary phase of the academy is unstable. Staff and leaders continue to work hard. Many are dedicated to improving the academic and social outcomes for pupils but this is not happening fast enough.

Gaps in staffing in the secondary phase mean that senior leaders are not always able to be as strategic as they need to be because they are teaching additional classes or resolving incidents. Nevertheless, the programme to improve the quality of teaching has continued, with some positive impact on individual staff. Behaviour and attendance information is consistently analysed and is used to plan and take action.

The academy's assessment system is not being used well enough to set challenging targets or to find out, on a regular basis, if secondary-aged pupils are making the progress they should. A great deal of information is generated but it is not properly analysed. Staff are confused about which parts of the data matter most and many are discouraged by the negative picture it seems to paint, which is not always an accurate reflection of what they and pupils are achieving. Some pupils are also becoming discouraged by the way the assessment information is being used as many feel they are failing. Too much of the assessment of the progress being made by Key Stage 3 pupils is inaccurate.

The process to transfer the academy to a new sponsor has also affected the academy's work. Staff are becoming unsettled by another imminent change. The Interim Principal has had to spend too much time in recent weeks managing the initial stages of the transfer. The current sponsor and the governors are well aware that this situation is not sustainable and have put in place intensive support to ensure that the Interim Principal can concentrate fully on the day-to-day management and strategic leadership of the academy.

Governors are rightly concerned about whether pupils are making enough progress and are aware of the need to ask leaders for more specific information about what the assessment information is actually telling them so that they can provide greater challenge. Governors have provided good support to help to ensure that where a pupil is excluded for a fixed period that they remain on track once they are back at the academy.

External support

There is no systematic external support for the academy. The new sponsor is aiming to provide some support as soon as possible.

Priorities for further improvement

- Analyse thoroughly all the current assessment information to find out how much progress pupils are making.
- Ensure that leaders, staff at all levels and governors ensure that they focus on the progress being made by all pupils, including those working at the lower levels, including in Year 11
- Update the mathematics curriculum.