

The Bulwell Academy

Squires Avenue, Nottingham, NG6 8HG

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The Principal and senior leaders are rigorous and committed; they have brought about rapid improvements to most areas of the academy.
- Most teachers ensure the good progress of students by planning lessons meticulously and addressing students' weaknesses quickly and, as a result, the students make good progress.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress throughout the academy. Leadership of this work of the academy is exceptionally strong.
- The pastoral care in the academy is exemplary; teachers provide high levels of care and support for students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable.
- Students make rapid progress in both English and mathematics because of the consistently high quality of teaching in these subjects.
- Students' behaviour around the academy is respectful and orderly; most show high levels of engagement in lessons.
- Disadvantaged students make rapid progress, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Outcomes in the sixth form are improving quickly; good quality teaching and leadership have ensured that almost all students make the progress they should.
- Governors and sponsors have supported the academy very well; resources have been used effectively and leaders are held to account rigorously.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' achievement in mathematics is not as good as their achievement in English at Key Stage 4. The proportions of students meeting, or exceeding the expectations for progress, are below the national averages for mathematics. They are, however, getting closer to the averages.
- Boys' achievement is not as good as girls' achievement. It is, however, improving quickly.
- Students' attendance to school is below the national average. It is also improving rapidly.
- Students' rates of progress in a few subjects are not improving fast enough; teaching in those areas is not always consistently good because teachers' planning does not meet the students' needs closely enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, 12 of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. They also carried out shorter visits to lessons and observed four tutorials and an assembly.
- Inspectors met with a range of academy staff, including the Principal, senior Vice-Principals, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, the special educational needs leader (SENCO), a group of teachers without leadership responsibilities, and leaders of behaviour and safety.
- Students were interviewed formally by inspectors and informally during break and lunch times and in lessons.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of academy documentation in relation to behaviour, teaching, and achievement. The lead inspector evaluated the academy’s self-evaluation report, governors’ minutes, and policy documents published on the academy’s website.
- The lead inspector interviewed two members of the governing body, who are also representatives of the academy sponsors: the Vice-Chair, who is the representative of the Edge Foundation Trust, and the headteacher of the Thomas Telford School. The inspector met also with the academy’s improvement consultant.

Inspection team

Zarina Connolly, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Colin Lower

Additional Inspector

Mark Cordell

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This academy is a slightly larger-than-average secondary school.
- The academy is set in an area more highly deprived than the national average.
- The academy is sponsored by two sponsors: The Edge Foundation Trust and The Thomas Telford School.
- Most of the students are of White British heritage. A small minority are from ethnic minorities.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium is almost three times the national average at 62%.
- The academy has a specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs, specifically for students with autism.
- A small number of students attend courses offered by alternative providers of education: Nisai Learning in Nottingham and Real Education in Ilkeston.
- In 2014, the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement at Key Stage 4 by:
 - increasing the proportions of students who meet and exceed expected progress in mathematics, and ensuring that students reach standards at least equal to those attained in English
 - ensuring that the quality of planning in subjects where the teaching is weak is as good as the best examples at the academy.
- Narrow the achievement gap between boys and girls, so that the accelerated progress of boys at Key Stage 3 continues into Key Stage 4.
- Improve students' attendance, especially at Key Stage 4, so that it reaches at least the national average by the end of 2015.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and senior leaders have brought about rapid improvements across the academy in a short period of time. They have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, including what still needs to be done. They have deliberately not resorted to 'quick fixes' to bring about improvements. Rather, they have undertaken a conscious 'root and branch' programme of changes to ensure sustained progress and success. As a result, they enjoy a very high level of support from both staff and parents.
- As a result of their actions, a strong culture of learning and high aspirations pervades the academy, providing the necessary conditions for students to thrive and make good progress. Work undertaken by leaders to improve the students' behaviour and attitudes, including attendance is successful. Bullying incidents are now rare.
- The Principal and the team of senior leaders have implemented simple and unambiguous systems to monitor and develop teaching. Professional development opportunities are wide-ranging and bespoke to teachers' needs. Consequently, teaching across the academy has improved and there is now no teaching that is inadequate and there is much that is now good.
- Weaker teaching remains in some subjects, particularly in art and history and, to some extent, in science. Leaders are fully aware of this weaker teaching and are tackling it urgently.
- Leaders' zero tolerance of failure, high expectations, and strong support systems have ensured that students make a good start at the academy. Prior gaps in learning are addressed by teachers quickly and the legacy of under-achievement is being tackled urgently. This has been particularly evident in English, and in mathematics at Key Stage 3.
- Academy leaders have been largely successful in ensuring that there is greater equality of achievement between different student groups. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to narrow the attainment gap between eligible students and other students in the academy. The difference in achievement between boys and girls at Key Stage 3 is now minimal. However, leaders acknowledge that more work is still to be done to accelerate boys' progress at Key Stage 4.
- The special educational needs leader provides very strong leadership in this area of the academy's work. She has ensured that students with additional and sometimes complex needs are supported well and helped to make good progress. The local authority has justifiably identified the academy as a centre of good practice in providing for special educational needs.
- The behaviour and attendance of students attending alternative provision are monitored effectively.
- Leadership in most subjects is strong in the academy. Where it is weaker, academy leaders are tackling it. Leaders of English and mathematics understand the strengths and weaknesses of their areas very well. They carry out their monitoring duties effectively and develop their teams well.
- Performance management of teachers and teaching assistants is used effectively to improve teaching and drive improvement across the academy. The use of 'score cards' by teachers to document their performance has been a successful way for teachers to take responsibility for their professional development. The Principal and governing body use strict criteria before granting pay awards. Performance pay is awarded only in exceptional circumstances.
- The curriculum changes over the past two years have improved the students' engagement in lessons, especially at Key Stages 4 and 5. Courses are now more suited to the ability and aspirations of the

students. In addition, there is a well-planned personal, social and health curriculum, which is supported by outside professionals. The programme of study includes workshops on issues such as cyber-bullying, relationships, and drugs and alcohol abuse.

- British values of respect, tolerance and the rule of law are taught well during tutor sessions and assemblies and understood by students. In addition, students' spiritual, moral and cultural understanding is developed well in a range of subjects. They are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Provision for advice and guidance about course choices in all key stages is comprehensive and helpful. Careers advice for students is wide-ranging and innovative. Students experience several opportunities to engage with work places and higher education providers to keep them informed about possible career options for their futures. The number of students who leave the academy not in employment, education or training is lower than the national average.
- The local authority monitors students' attendance and provision for special educational needs very well. Its due diligence has contributed to rapid improvements in these areas. A governor-commissioned academy improvement adviser has provided helpful and insightful external reviews for the Principal and governors.
- Academy leaders receive good support from the Thomas Telford's family of schools. Teachers and leaders have benefited from learning from good practice. Importantly, they have played an important role in ensuring the reliability of students' assessments, especially in the core subjects.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities. It ensures that its statutory duties are executed diligently. Safeguarding policies and practices are fully compliant with statutory requirements.
 - The governing body has not just relied on information about the academy's improvement from leaders. Members have gained first-hand evidence through visits to the academy and used external reviews to verify the academy's progress. They are ambitious and hold leaders to account rigorously.
 - Performance related pay is used appropriately.
 - The Governing Body keeps sound financial oversight of the academy's budget. Its astute decisions regarding staffing appointments and the deployment of government funding have ensured balanced accounts year on year.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Most students conduct themselves respectfully and have good attitudes to their learning. Many lessons are characterised by high levels of involvement and interest by learners. The students' books are well kept and students, generally, show pride in their work.
- Relationships between adults and students and between students and their peers in the academy are harmonious. There are very few bullying incidents. Students and parents have confidence in the way the behaviour policy is applied and know that teachers will deal with problems quickly.
- Overall attendance has rapidly improved over the last year, but has not reached the national averages. Students' attendance rates are lower at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. The proportion of students absent regularly has also reduced quickly. This is as a result of a coordinated approach by pastoral leaders to monitor absences and address students' personal and emotional needs.
- Students are usually punctual to the academy and lessons.
- The proportion of students excluded from the academy has also declined rapidly. As a result, many fewer days are lost by students to exclusions now than ever before. Academy leaders work effectively to identify

students at risk of exclusion and use a range of preventative measures.

- The well-chosen alternative provision has helped to re-engage students to education. As a result, the behaviour and attendance of students in alternative provision are good.
- The excellent work of the pastoral leaders has ensured that students, especially those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, are cared for and supported well. Consequently, students, across the academy, are very cooperative and supportive of the academy.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe is good. The staff are vigilant about safeguarding matters. The academy's policies and procedures for safeguarding students are secure and meet statutory requirements. Students say they feel safe in the academy.
- Students are well informed about different types of bullying, including homophobic and cyber-bullying. Academy records show that these incidents have reduced considerably since the previous inspection and are now rare. Most students are tolerant and respectful towards one another. Students' attitudes towards those who are different, including towards disabled students, are kind and accepting.
- Students understand the risks associated with extremism. Lessons in Key Stage 4 on this issue have been effective in explaining local threats and developing students' understanding of the cause and effects of extremist ideology.
- Students are kept safe in the alternative provision.

The quality of teaching is good

- Academy leaders have successfully eradicated any inadequate teaching.
- The quality of teaching in English is now consistently good. Teaching in mathematics is improving quickly and is mostly good. The teaching of many of the vocational subjects in the curriculum is also good. Where there is weaker teaching, academy leaders put in place individual support plans for teachers and provide bespoke training opportunities.
- Most teachers make good use of the detailed information about students' needs and their current progress to plan their lessons. Stronger teaching is characterised by careful planning and interactive activities, where students are encouraged to discuss and plan their work together. Misunderstandings are tackled early because the teachers' questioning is sufficiently probing.
- The academy's focus on progress for all students has ensured that individuals who are identified as underachieving, or who require additional support receive extra intervention lessons promptly. Teaching assistants and academic coaches have a deep knowledge and understanding of individual needs, enabling them to make learning more effective. Students in Key Stage 4 value the support they receive in after-school and Saturday revision sessions.
- Students are much more engaged in lessons than ever before because teachers' subject knowledge is secure. The teachers have developed good relationships in the classroom, so that students, even when they find things difficult, do not give up. Teachers' high expectations of students help to spur them on. The most-able students are challenged well in most lessons.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to students is mostly very helpful. Teachers adhere to the academy's policy across departments. The strongest marking, for example in English and mathematics, is characterised by specific advice about the next steps for the students and 'challenge' questions, to which students respond. Students say that they value the time to reflect on their work given in lessons.
- Work to improve students' literacy skills across the academy is given a high priority and has been largely

successful, especially in Key Stage 3. Teachers are quick to identify students' weaknesses in reading and writing skills. Individualised targets provide a clear literacy focus for all subjects. As a result, writing skills, especially students' spelling, punctuation, and grammar is developed quickly.

- Where there is weaker teaching, for example, in art and history, teachers do not always engage students well enough and sustain their interest. Their planning does not always take into account the range of students' needs well enough.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start at the academy with attainment levels in English and mathematics well below national averages. Nevertheless, during Key Stage 3, students make rapid progress.
- At Key Stage 4, students continue to make progress quickly in a range of subjects. Academy leaders have learnt from previous years' inadequate examination results. Consequently, in English, students now meet and exceed national expectations for progress. In mathematics, students' progress is moving quickly towards national levels.
- Students learn and acquire skills well in a range of subjects across the key stages. Students' outcomes in most subjects are improving year on year.
- Students eligible for pupil premium funding make progress quickly, especially at Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4, these students are less than one grade behind other students nationally in English and just over a grade behind in mathematics. This represents a considerable improvement since the previous year. The gap in attainment between eligible students and others within the academy is equivalent to three quarters of a grade in English and one grade in mathematics. Most remarkable is that there is now very little difference between the progress that disadvantaged students make compared to other students nationally in English.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress at Key Stage 3 and are improving their progress at Key Stage 4. A well-led and coordinated team of support staff ensures that those students with complex needs, especially in the academy's specialist unit, learn and achieve well.
- The achievement of boys has improved considerably compared to previous years. In Key Stage 3 there is hardly any difference between the progress of boys and girls in both English and mathematics. The gap is wider at Key Stage 4, although closing quickly. The proportion of boys set to achieve five GCSEs at A*-C is much improved compared to 2014, although their attainment remains too far behind that of girls.
- High expectations held by staff and by students have ensured improved outcomes for the most-able students. The progress of the most-able students is rapid in Years 7-10. Their progress in Year 11 in English and mathematics is moving closer towards the national averages for the most-able.
- Students attending full-time alternative provision achieve well. Academy leaders check their progress carefully. Over the last two years, a large majority has achieved a GCSE equivalent qualification in English or mathematics.
- Students in Year 7, who join the academy with attainment below national expectations, make rapid progress as a result of the appropriate and targeted use of the Catch-up funding. This is because of effective discrete support lessons and targeted programmes of study.
- Literacy and numeracy intervention strategies at Key Stage 3 are making a difference. For example, in Year 8, the large majority of students has 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.
- The academy has adopted an early entry policy this year for the core subjects. This decision was made

after a careful analysis of the benefits and risks of such a strategy. Early evidence suggests that no particular group has been adversely affected by this strategy. Leaders' analysis suggests the most able and the low ability students benefit from the extra exam experience and early preparation for closed examinations.

- While students make rapid progress in many subjects, their progress in a few, notably art and history, remains too slow. Students' progress is improving in science, but not as quickly as in other subjects.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Most students learn and achieve well from their different starting points because the quality of teaching is good. The courses that the students study, which are mostly vocational, are chosen carefully by academy leaders to ensure that students' interests are sustained and that they are successful. The vast majority of students in the sixth form are on track to achieve their target grades.
- Nearly all students in Year 13 have secured a place in further training or higher education. The proportion of students receiving conditional offers from universities has risen markedly this year. The academy provides strong guidance for students, so that they can make well-informed post-sixth form choices.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly and targeted mentoring sessions provide extra support for those students at risk of falling behind.
- The students' study programmes are well designed. Students experience a range of enrichment activities that help to prepare them for life outside and beyond the academy. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form, feel safe, and the vast majority attend regularly and behave well.
- Students who have not yet achieved a GCSE qualification in English or in mathematics are supported well. All are on track to achieve a grade C or above.
- In 2014, the minimum standards, set by the Department for Education, were met.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135685
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	462747

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	932
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bowater
Principal	Paul Halcro
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2013
Telephone number	0115 915 9750
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