

The Mirus Academy

Leamore Lane, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS2 7NR

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- The achievement of all groups of pupils is inadequate: their attainment is low in English and mathematics, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4, and their progress is far too slow.
- Teaching is inadequate and improvements that have occurred have not made enough difference to pupils' achievement. There have not been enough subject specialist teachers in English and mathematics.
- Behaviour is inadequate. Academy leaders do not use effective strategies to manage poor behaviour and they rely too much on exclusions from school.
- Pupils' attendance is low and the number of pupils who are frequently absent from school, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is much higher than average.
- The sixth form is inadequate.
- Leaders have not taken quick enough action to tackle the significant weaknesses in pupils' achievement and in the quality of teaching.
- Leaders, including governors, have not made sure that the spending of additional government funding targeted at the most disadvantaged pupils, which in this academy is the majority of pupils, is improving these pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils told inspectors that they generally feel safe and academy leaders work well to care for the most vulnerable pupils.
- For some pupils, their attainment and rates of progress are rising at the end of Year 6.
- Newly qualified and trainee teachers are supported well.
- Leaders, including governors, understand the weaknesses and strengths of the academy's work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. They also observed an assembly, 'Learning For Life' sessions, breaks and lunchtimes, and listened to pupils read.
- The inspection team met with senior and subject leaders, groups of pupils and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 17 parents and carers who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire), an email received from one parent, the 21 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the academy's own surveys of parents and carers.
- The inspection team analysed information about examination results, pupils' progress, their attendance and behaviour and other aspects of pupils' personal development and achievement. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the academy's self-evaluation and its records relating to the monitoring of teaching and safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

James McNeillie, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mel Ford	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Taylor	Additional Inspector
Steven Cartlidge	Additional Inspector
Sheila Boyle	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector

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.

Information about this school

- The academy, sponsored by Walsall College, opened in January 2012.
- The Mirus Academy is larger than the average-sized school.
- Nineteen new members of the teaching staff joined the academy in September 2013.
- Almost all pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is considerably above average, and the proportions supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below average.
- A much higher than average proportion of pupils at this academy (almost 70%) are supported by the pupil premium, which in this academy provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- There are currently 21 pupils attending classes away from the academy for part of the week. The institutions providing these pupils with alternative and work-related courses are The Vine, Nova Training and Alpha Hair.
- The academy does not meet the government's most recently published floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- 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:

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- 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.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Across all years of the academy, groups of pupils, including those supported by the pupil premium funding and those who are disabled or have special educational needs, make inadequate progress from their already below-average starting points.
- Pupils throughout the academy have low levels of literacy. These crucial skills, as well as those of mathematics, are not being developed well enough and pupils have insufficient good opportunities to use and apply the skills they do have in different subjects.
- The achievement of pupils in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4 has been well below national averages since the academy opened. In 2013, only 27% of pupils achieved a GCSE grade C or above in English and only 41% in mathematics. The achievement of pupils currently in Years 7 to 11, while showing some improvements, remains inadequate in these key subjects. The academy's early entry policy for GCSE has made no discernible difference to pupils' achievement, including that of more able pupils.
- At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils supported by the pupil premium funding were approximately two thirds of a GCSE grade behind their classmates in English. The gap between these pupils and their classmates in mathematics was smaller.
- Other test results at the end of Key Stage 4 also indicate inadequate achievement across a range of subjects. However, 2013 results do show some improvements in science, information and communication technology and physical education, subjects which are studied by every student in Years 9 to 11.
- The academic achievement of the relatively small number of students in the sixth form is inadequate.
- In Years 1 to 6, pupils' achievement is also inadequate. Year 6 test results in 2013 show that the standards pupils reached in reading, writing and mathematics were better than in the 2012. However, these improvements mask the fact that the overall progress pupils made across Key Stage 2 was too slow. The progress in mathematics made by Year 6 pupils in summer 2013 was good.
- The 2013 Year 6 test results show that pupils supported by the pupil premium funding were almost four terms behind their classmates in reading, almost three terms behind in writing and more than four terms behind in mathematics. These gaps had widened since the 2012 results.
- Achievement in Key Stage 1 declined slightly in 2013 when compared to the previous year's assessments.
- Children's achievement in the Nursery and Reception classes requires improvement, although many children make better progress in the Nursery class.
- Planned spending of the primary school sport funding is to support primary pupils' achievement in this area and contribute to promoting healthier lifestyles.
- There is evidence that pupils with exceptionally weak reading skills are being well supported in the Year 7 'Learning Zone'. These pupils have made rapid progress in developing the ability to read since they started in September. This is one way in which leaders are using additional funding provided to support Year 7 pupils with below-average English skills.
- Older pupils who attend courses away from the academy site for part of the week do not make enough progress. However, because of these courses, some pupils are attending more regularly and others are gaining work-related qualifications.
- Almost all pupils stay on in education or training, or find employment at the end of Year 11. However, for many pupils, the very low level of skills acquired while at the academy, mean they are not as well prepared as they should be for life beyond compulsory education.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Inadequate teaching has resulted in pupils across the academy making very slow progress. Improvements to teaching have not been quick enough to make a substantial difference to pupils' achievement, particularly in Years 7 to 11. It is only since September 2013 that the English and mathematics teams have been made up of permanent teachers who are all subject specialists.
- Teachers do not make sure that pupils of different abilities and with different needs are catered for well enough in the primary and secondary years. While most teachers do consider these aspects in their planning, this does not then transfer well enough into what actually happens in lessons.
- Marking and feedback to pupils is not good enough across all subjects and year groups. Too often, pupils are told only what they have done well and not what they need to do to improve. When 'next steps' feedback is given, it is not precise enough. For example, in one pupil's book, the teacher wrote 'add more detail' but did not give any more guidance. This was typical of the comments seen. In addition, teachers do not make sure that pupils then act on teachers' comments.
- Teachers do not make sure that pupils move on quickly enough in their learning. This is because activities are allowed to go on for too long, or poor attitudes to learning are not addressed.
- There is not enough teaching that helps pupils to develop as independent learners, especially in Years 7 to 11. Often, pupils rely on the teacher, or another adult, to provide answers or do not take an active role in their own learning. Often, older pupils in the secondary phase do not have the skills they need to manage their learning or their behaviour when not under the direct control of the teacher.
- Teachers do not use additional adults in lessons well enough to make sure that pupils who are struggling receive enough support to develop their skills and become independent learners. This is apparent in lessons for pupils of all ages, but is more common in lessons with older pupils.
- Teaching observed in Reception classes required improvement because the planning and organisation of learning did not allow children to make good progress. There was not enough structure or purpose to sessions when children were given a choice of activities. Teaching in the Nursery class was better.
- When teaching is good or outstanding, and there is an increasing proportion that is, teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can and must achieve. In these lessons, teachers know what pupils can already do and what aspects of skills or knowledge they need to develop. Teachers use interesting and stimulating resources, and activities that motivate and engage pupils, and, in turn, this means pupils' attitudes to learning are good or outstanding. However, there is not enough of such good or outstanding teaching to make a difference to pupils' overall achievement.
- Teaching observed in the sixth form during the inspection was good. Students, including those with lower levels of ability, were well supported in developing their skills and knowledge, for example in how to analyse a media text. However, there has not been enough good teaching in the past to help students to achieve well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

- Levels of exclusions from the academy for older pupils are high. A significant minority are excluded more than once, which indicates that these sanctions, and the strategies academy leaders are using to tackle concerns, are not making a difference. Exclusions are beginning to reduce, but too slowly.
- Attendance rates for pupils, and groups of pupils, across the academy are low, particularly for older pupils. The academy's own records show that between 18% and 20% of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are persistently absent and this is considerably more than national averages.
- Academy leaders could point to individual examples of where attendance and behaviour had improved and some of this was as a result of activities and strategies funded by the pupil

premium grant. However, improvements are not consistently sustained beyond these individual examples.

- Many older pupils do not arrive on time at the beginning of the day or to the beginning of lessons. This is not the case for primary-aged pupils because of a concerted focus on punctuality by academy leaders.
- Much of the behaviour observed during the inspection required improvement. Low-level disruption in lessons and passive behaviour prevented good learning. Some behaviour observed was inadequate, despite teachers having planned lessons that were interesting and worthwhile. Younger pupils have more consistently positive attitudes to learning than pupils in Years 7 to 11.
- Pupils explained that behaviour in lessons is too often dependent on which teacher they have. This frustrates them, and is a sign that there is not enough consistency across the academy in the way in which teachers manage poor behaviour and promote good behaviour.
- The views expressed by pupils, members of staff and the small percentage of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire match those of inspectors. Parents of pupils in Years 7 and 8 who responded to the academy's own surveys were more positive about behaviour.
- Behaviour and conduct out of lessons are not good enough, particularly because of boisterous behaviour by older pupils during, and at the end of, the academy day.
- Pupils told inspectors that they generally feel safe at the academy and that there is always a member of staff they can go to for help if needed. Pupils new to the academy say that they are made to feel welcome. Pupils have a good awareness of different types of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying. They are confident that teachers and other adults deal well with any incidents. The academy's records confirm that leaders take seriously any concerns and take appropriate action.
- Pupils who attend courses away from the academy say they feel safe and are aware of what to do if there are any concerns, and academy leaders visit the students regularly.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders have not made sure that teaching is of a sufficient quality to enable pupils, and groups of pupils, to make enough progress.
- The substantial amount of pupil premium funding the academy has received has not made a positive difference to the achievement of the group of pupils it is intended to support.
- Academy leaders have not made sure that the provision for pupils who have special educational needs has been effective. A recently appointed member of staff has started to tackle these weaknesses.
- Significant failures in the leadership of English resulted in inaccurate predictions of pupils' achievement in 2013. This critical error led to leaders, and pupils, having false hopes and pupils not receiving crucial additional support.
- A rigorous focus on making the link between how well pupils, and groups of pupils, are achieving and the quality of teaching, is a relatively recent development. However, leaders have an understanding of what good and better teaching looks like, and the judgements they made during joint observations matched those of inspectors.
- Leadership of the sixth form has, in the past, been inadequate, as shown in the poor achievement of students. Provision is in place to support those students who join the sixth form without having achieved the appropriate levels in English and mathematics. Opportunities for students to access relevant work-related opportunities are under-developed.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage of the academy has begun to make a difference, as shown in the fact that children's experiences and achievement are improving.
- Senior and subject leaders have an accurate understanding of what needs to improve and have the commitment to achieve these improvements. Actions taken since the academy opened have not been quick or effective enough to improve all pupils' experiences. Many of the

developments, such as the drive to improve literacy skills across all subjects, are too recent to have made a difference, and the lack of personnel to lead this across all phases is a barrier.

- Senior leaders have gathered a wide range of information about various aspects of the academy's work but the analysis of this in terms of identifying what is working well and what needs to be changed, including in relation to the management of pupils' behaviour, is not clear enough.
- Support for newly qualified and trainee teachers is effective. For this reason, inspectors do not have concerns about the appointment of more newly qualified teachers as long as governors are satisfied that there are appropriate measures in place to support individual teachers. Teachers at various stages of their career spoke positively about training they have received and inspectors saw some evidence of the impact of this in classrooms.
- There is appropriate management of teachers' performance, which includes the involvement of the governors. The few examples of pay progression for teachers have been approved only when there has been demonstrable positive impact on pupils' achievement.
- Senior leaders and governors have provided opportunities for less experienced leaders to extend their skills, for example by encouraging these leaders to successfully apply for national leadership development courses.
- The range of subjects and courses that pupils study is appropriate across all the phases; however, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop and then use their basic skills.
- Academy leaders and teachers ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of different cultures and provide pupils with creative and memorable experiences. Despite behaviour being judged to be inadequate, pupils do often show respect for each other and adults.
- Academy leaders have yet to receive government funding to promote and improve sport in the primary years. The plans in place to use this funding are appropriate and include ensuring that pupils in Years 1 to 6 are taught by a physical education specialist and increasing the range of resources for pupils to use.
- Safeguarding meets national requirements. Leaders work well with external agencies to make sure that the very many vulnerable young people who attend the academy are cared for well.
- The sponsor has provided human resources and financial support to academy leaders and commissioned reviews of aspects of the academy's work. The quality of some of these reviews, particularly those undertaken in English and mathematics in July 2013, were poor and not helpful to leaders. A more recent review was of a good standard.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are aware of the significant weaknesses in pupils' achievement when compared to that of all pupils nationally and the direct link this has with inadequate teaching over time. This knowledge enables them to support the Principal in the decisions she has made in relation to whether or not teachers or leaders should be rewarded with pay progression. Governors' understanding of the quality of the academy's work also means that they can, and do, hold senior leaders to account for their work. Members of the governing body monitor closely the spending of additional funding, have evaluated that it has not made a discernible difference to relevant pupils' achievement and, with academy leaders, are identifying ways to remedy this issue. An external review of governance started in the summer of 2013 but is not yet completed.

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	137274
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	399886

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1223
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Henriette Harnisch
Headteacher	Jacqui Grace (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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