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5 November 2010

Ms Pat Towey  
Principal  
Unity City Academy  
Ormesby Road  
Middlesbrough  
TS3 8RE

Dear Ms Towey

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Unity City Academy**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 4 November 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the students who met with us.

Since the last inspection there has been a reorganisation of leadership responsibilities including the creation of a Director of Inclusion post and the appointment of a new Head of English. The number of students on roll has continued to decline although the academy is now attracting an increasing proportion of first preference choices in its admissions to Year 7.

As a result of the inspection on 1 and 2 July 2009, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The attainment of students on entry to the academy varies, but is generally low. In particular many students arrive with literacy skills that are significantly below national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is low. However, 2009 and 2010 saw a steady increase in the percentage of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics in GCSE examinations. Results from students' early entry to GCSE English and mathematics courses indicate that this upward trend is likely to continue in 2011. The continued development of the vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4 has had a significant impact on increasing the proportion of students gaining five or more equivalent A\* to C grades. Attainment



here is well above the national average and consequently most students are now progressing successfully onto further study, training or employment. However, the academy recognises that in order to ensure these young people have the best life chances it must increase the proportion who leave with good qualifications in functional literacy and numeracy.

Observations during the inspection coupled with data from external assessments confirm that students are making better progress in their studies relative to their starting points. The academy has been successful in raising achievement at Key Stage 4. However, progress at Key Stage 3 has been slower. The principal has identified this as a priority for further improvement. For those students who have the most acute additional literacy needs, or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the academy has recently revised its intensive reading, spelling and comprehension support programmes. Initial assessment information shows that students participating in these programmes are making rapid progress. However, the number of students involved is quite small and too many other students have reading ages well below that expected.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection, but still remains low. A small proportion of students continue to be persistently absent. The academy has been imaginative in seeking to encourage good attendance. Progress and pastoral managers are working more closely together to make the link between good attendance and higher levels of achievement. Consequently, all Year 11 students left the academy in summer 2010 with at least one pass in an external examination.

The measures to improve teaching are having a positive demonstrable impact. Lessons are now well structured and classroom behaviour is increasingly well managed. The proportion of good or better lessons has increased. The academy has secured effective support from a broad range of consultants to ensure that each department has had access to carefully targeted training. Robust systems are in place to track student progress and provide teachers with detailed assessment information. Staff have a clearer understanding of student targets. Insufficient emphasis is placed on designing work to meet the needs of different groups of learners. As a result, in some classes, more able students do not receive sufficient challenge. However, new approaches to planning lessons are being piloted.. In lessons where teachers talk for too long, students can become bored and progress slows. Too frequently students are not actively involved in their learning and are given insufficient opportunities to develop independent learning skills. A more practical thinking and learning skills approach in Year 7 has been introduced. However, its impact on changing attitudes to learning has yet to be systematically evaluated. The academy has appropriate strategies to monitor the quality of teaching and has made satisfactory progress in improving lesson planning.

Considerable effort has been put in to raise the standard of marking and the quality of feedback given to students. Older students particularly appreciate the guidance received on their vocational courses. Considerable attention is given across all

subjects to literacy marking, giving guidance on improving spelling, punctuation and grammar. Good progress has been made in ensuring marking is more effective.

The academy's specialism for applied enterprise continues to drive forward the vision for the Key Stage 4 vocational curriculum. Since the last inspection new BTEC courses have been introduced and most vocational routes are now delivered at Level 2. A small number of apprenticeship posts have been developed and are an increasingly popular route for those aged 16 or older.

Day-to-day management is strong. As a result the academy has a calm and increasingly successful learning environment. The senior leadership has an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and priorities for development. Development planning is robust and is clearly having a significant impact on driving improvement across the academy. This is reflected in increases in attainment, attendance, the quality of teaching, and the decline in those not progressing successfully onto education, employment or training at age 16. Parents are also demonstrating an increasing confidence in the academy.

I hope that you found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lowery  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2009**

- Raise attainment at both key stages and particularly in English.
- Maintain the momentum to improve attendance and punctuality further.
- Ensure that assessment information is used by teachers when planning lessons so that activities match the needs of all learners, in all lessons, all of the time.
- Ensure that the marking of students' work informs them about how well they have done and is clear about what is required to improve.