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28 September 2012

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

Dear Ms Towey

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Unity City Academy**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 27 September 2012, and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the students, staff, governors and the representative of the academy's sponsor that I met or talked with during the day.

Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes of staff. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language on the roll of the academy has increased. The academy is one of several local primary and secondary schools which are forming a 'family' of schools. Some formal issues relating to the sponsorship of the academy are still in the process of being finalised.

As a result of the inspection on 24 January 2012, the school 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 is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Students are making better progress now than at the previous inspection. There has been a substantial increase in examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2012 compared with 2011. Ninety eight per cent of students gained five or more GCSEs or equivalents at grades A\* to C, up 10 percentage points from 2011 and considerably above the most recently published national figure. The proportion gaining five good grades including English and mathematics rose from 25% in 2011 to 48% in 2012. While still below the most recent national figure, it is much closer to it and it now meets the government floor target, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment. Results at grade C and above in English and mathematics both rose, by 19 percentage points and 25 percentage points respectively. The percentage making expected levels of progress increased by 12 percentage points in English and by 28 percentage points in mathematics. Outcomes in mathematics now broadly match the most recent national figures, and in English, while still below, are closer to them. This improved achievement is also reflected in the fact that

January 2012



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results in almost all other subjects rose, as did attainment across other year groups. The number of GCSE courses taken by students is higher this year than previously.

Although gaps in achievement across different groups of students are closing overall, there remains some variability. For example, while on many measures there is little difference in performance between students eligible for the pupil premium and others, students with special educational needs supported at school action plus, those who speak English as an additional language and higher-attaining students do not always achieve as well as others. There continues to be fewer students making better than expected progress than nationally.

Some of the improvement in outcomes at the end of Year 11 in 2012 is attributable to more rigorous and regular tracking of students' progress during the course of the year and the more specifically targeted intervention taken as a result. Alongside this, concerted action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching. Professional development has been provided for all teachers on whole-school priorities, such as improving students' literacy skills. The impact of this is evident. Closer attention is paid to the literacy demands of lessons and to developing students' general literacy skills and their ability to utilise these to access the subject specific content of the lesson. Other actions to improve literacy have been introduced, although continuing to improve students' literacy and numeracy remains a priority. More specific, helpful, professional development is being provided for groups of teachers with different needs, and where required, for individuals. This is having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and the amount that is good and better is increasing. This is recognised and appreciated by students. Inconsistencies in quality remain, however. Work to improve students' attitudes to learning and their confidence, aspirations and attendance is making a difference. The use of sanctions to deal with inappropriate behaviour is falling, showing better attitudes and behaviour. However, especially where teaching fails to engage students or meet their needs fully, there continues to be some low-level disruption. Teachers are generally using the detailed information they have about students to give some thought as to how to meet their needs in lessons, but this is not yet done with enough precision. Attendance is rising although some students still do not attend regularly enough.

There has been a restructuring and clarification of leadership roles and management processes, with middle leaders, especially those in core subject departments who are now members of the extended senior leadership team, playing a more prominent part. Expectations and accountability at different levels have been strengthened and quality assurance processes made more comprehensive and rigorous. For example, lesson observations which are known about in advance are now complemented with more frequent and formalised 'drop-ins' to lessons by leaders, and evidence about impact on student outcomes is being given greater emphasis in judging effectiveness. The outcomes from monitoring are being acted upon in a more focused manner than previously. Training and support provided to develop the knowledge and skills of middle leaders have had a helpful impact, and more leaders are also attending external courses to sharpen their understanding further. The new arrangements are positive, albeit at early stages of implementation.

The statement of action produced following the previous inspection is fit for purpose. Support on a wide variety of issues for teachers, leaders at all levels and governors has been provided by the sponsor and other external consultants. This has been found to be very beneficial and has hastened the rate of progress made within the academy.

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

Yours sincerely

Ms Joan McKenna  
Additional inspector

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012**

- Raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress, especially in English and mathematics, and ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better throughout the academy, by:
  - ensuring students' literacy and numeracy skills are developed more systematically and more consistently across all subjects
  - ensuring that all staff have the highest expectations of what all students can achieve, especially the most able
  - extending the use of dialogue and probing questions in lessons to give students more opportunities to actively participate, develop their ideas fully, deepen their thinking and drive learning forward
  - enabling students to understand precisely what the subject-specific actions for improvement are, and how to achieve them, so that all students are supported to take greater responsibility for managing and developing their own learning.
  
- Develop the role of middle leaders by ensuring that all their monitoring activities:
  - are undertaken with greater consistency
  - are evaluated more effectively
  - lead to prompt action to improve the quality of teaching and learning and, as a result, drive up attainment and achievement.