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2 May 2013

Mr Stephen Ball
Headteacher
New Charter Academy
Broadoak Road
Ashton-Under-lyne
OL6 8RF

Dear Mr Ball

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to New Charter Academy, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, who is also a representative from the sponsor, two other members of the governing body and two groups of students. I evaluated the academy's improvement plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the academy.

Context

Since the last inspection, a lead practitioner and three other teachers have been appointed in mathematics and two other teachers in information and communication technology/business.

Main findings

The academy improvement plan, which has been written in response to the recent inspection, provides a clear route map for how senior leaders will bring about sustained improvement. There are clear lines of responsibility and actions are underpinned by the academy's ethos that all students will, 'learn, grow, achieve'. Senior leaders and governors are not interested in quick fixes and are investing time, energy and resources into more long term strategies to tackle underachievement.

The academy's procedures for quality assurance are very thorough. The next round of lesson observations and work scrutiny was due to commence soon after the last inspection. However, senior leaders took the decision to postpone this until after a programme of staff training had taken place. Staff have been given clear guidelines about expectations following this training. The round of lesson observations and work scrutiny which is planned for next month is intended to enable leaders to measure the impact of this training. Students spoken to have already noticed a difference. For example they have more opportunity to explore their learning independently and, in mathematics in particular, students say the work they are given is better suited to their individual needs.

An area for improvement from the last inspection was to ensure that all teachers applied the academy's behaviour policy and procedures consistently. Senior leaders believe that a more 'root and branch' approach is required as the policies and procedures themselves are too reactive and do nothing to address the causes of students' inappropriate behaviour. From September, there are plans for fundamental changes to how behaviour is managed in the academy, including the creation of some new facilities. Again, those students spoken to feel that behaviour in lessons has already improved since the recent inspection.

Following the last inspection, senior leaders have produced a pupil premium action plan. The plan outlines a range of actions which leaders believe will narrow the gap between the achievement of those students supported by this additional funding and their peers. These actions however, are not linked to measurable milestones and there is no clear indication of how they will be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals.

The new purpose-built accommodation offers high quality facilities to staff and students in such areas as sport and performing arts. However, the open plan design of the building has also brought several challenges for senior leaders. There is nowhere in the academy for quiet learning and study and this has proved problematic for the location of the library. There are few places where confidential conversations can take place which is particularly concerning as the academy has a large proportion of vulnerable students. There is also a risk to the planned improvements to teaching and learning because of the design and layout of some of the teaching spaces.

Governance of the academy continues to be very strong. They have supported the academy through some tough staffing decisions and, having come through this challenging time, feel that the recent inspection has given them a springboard for moving forward. The strong experience of good governance procedures which the sponsor has brought, ensures that you and your senior leaders are challenged robustly as well as supported in your actions.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- sharpen the pupil premium action plan so that leaders can measure and evaluate the impact of their actions at regular intervals
- resolve the accommodation issues.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy receives strong and effective support from the sponsor and there is a very clear shared vision based on improving the life chances of all students. You benefit from regular meetings with a representative from the sponsor to check that everything is on track and that you have the necessary support. Through the sponsor, the academy has access to a range of partners, programmes and projects within the Greater Manchester area, such as The University of Manchester and The Royal Exchange Theatre. They also assist with community issues and offer support with human resources, asset management and finance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and as below.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- The academy chain
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The lead inspector.