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10 June 2013

Mr F McCarron  
Principal  
Stockport Academy  
Heathbank Road  
Cheadle Heath  
Stockport  
Cheshire  
SK3 0UP

Dear Mr McCarron

## **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stockport Academy, Stockport**

Following my visit to your academy on 7 June 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, meetings were held with you and with members of your senior leadership team, curriculum leaders for mathematics, English and science, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Managing Director for Academies from United Learning, which is the academy's sponsor, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy's improvement plan was evaluated and you accompanied me on a tour of the academy which gave me the opportunity to speak informally with staff and students.

### **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection the academy's staffing review has been concluded and permanent appointments have been secured for all posts.

### **Main findings**

You have created a culture of aspiration and self-belief that inspires the work of the academy. Leaders, teachers, governors and students commented on the transformation that has taken place in a short time because of strong leadership, clear systems and the nurturing of individual potential.

The academy's improvement plan outlines clear, specific actions that are being taken to raise achievement and tackle the weaknesses identified in the section 5 inspection report. Leaders at all levels are ambitious for students' success and their roles in ensuring a positive future have been precisely defined. There are scheduled, transparent processes by which senior leaders check on the work of subject leaders, and subject leaders keep track of the work of individual teachers.

Leaders' and teachers' understanding of students' performance data has been improved considerably through training and support that has enabled them to understand what good and outstanding progress looks like and identify any individuals who are at risk of falling behind. Effective strategies for supporting these students have been discussed and agreed in terms of classroom teaching and additional specialist support. The school's data confirms that achievement is rising and that gaps in performance, including between boys and girls, and between students supported by pupil premium funding and their peers, are beginning to narrow.

The leadership of teaching is dynamic and challenging. A strong training and coaching programme is complemented by rigorous monitoring and honest evaluation. Subject leaders have been trained to observe the work of colleagues and to provide insightful feedback that precisely identifies the factors contributing to students' progress. A culture of honest professional dialogue has been developed that is helping all teachers to develop their skills and celebrate success.

The achievement of students in the sixth form is rising and more students are completing the courses on which they are enrolled. The same rigorous quality assurance processes have been introduced to the sixth form as to the main academy.

Attendance is rising due to more rigorous monitoring and earlier intervention to support students in addressing individual difficulties. The work of the pastoral managers makes a major contribution to removing barriers for individuals and spurring on their achievement.

Leaders, governors, students and staff agree that there is a marked improvement in students' behaviour due to the consistent implementation of agreed standards of conduct. Fewer students are now excluded from the academy and the vast majority of lessons proceed without disruption.

Governors have taken appropriate steps to develop their understanding of performance data. They now receive accurate, reliable data at regular intervals and ask searching questions of school leaders with regard to any issues it raises. The sponsor is working to provide a system of data snapshots to benchmark the work of its academies. Arrangements have been made for a review of the governing body by an external challenge partner.

Students are regularly consulted on improvements to the academy and they are enthusiastic about the role they play in taking it to the next stage in its development. Students were instrumental in securing the recent Childline BIG award in recognition of the academy's excellent work in challenging bullying in all its forms, including homophobia.

Senior leaders, governors, and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that more students make outstanding progress from their relative starting points by maintaining a strong focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The academy's sponsor, United Learning, provides well-judged support to the academy. The sponsors recognise and value your own track record of success, and that of your Vice Principal. They have enabled you to pursue the academy's improvement agenda using strategies that you have developed. These are shared as good practice models among other academies within the group. Sponsors have provided additional funding to support Year 11 students in preparing for their final examinations

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Group Chief Executive of United Learning Trust and the Director of Children's Services for Stockport.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

John Coles, Group Chief Executive, United Learning

Andrew Webb, Corporate Director, Services to People, Stockport