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Mr Paul Carter
Acting Principal
Manchester Creative and Media Academy for Girls
300 Victoria Avenue East
Blackley
Manchester
M9 7SS

Dear Mr Carter

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Manchester Creative and Media Academy for Girls, Manchester

Following my visit to your academy on 8 October 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

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

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy's sponsors should take further action to:

- establish the strategic direction of the academy by urgently resolving uncertainty regarding trust arrangements, thus enabling the appointment of a new substantive principal

The academy should take further action to:

- develop the classroom environment to ensure that students' work is celebrated and used to extend their learning
- accelerate students' progress by ensuring that tasks in lessons are well- matched to students' abilities and give appropriate challenge
- make links with successful schools to share and further develop good practice

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the you, your three vice principals, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, the literacy coordinator, two recently appointed teachers, students, a governor, the Regional Director from Schools' Partnership Trust

Academies (SPTA) and an SPTA consultant who has quality assured the academy's work. The academy's improvement plan was evaluated and its monitoring records and self-evaluation document were considered. Brief visits were made to several mathematics and English lessons.

Context

There have been significant changes to staffing since the recent section 5 inspection. In summer 2013, the principal and one vice principal left to take up leadership posts elsewhere. Sixteen teachers also left the academy. Eleven new teachers started in September 2013 and several others have recently returned from periods of maternity leave. You are leading the academy as an interim measure until the appointment of a substantive principal is made. You continue to receive support from the Regional Director of the Schools' Partnership Trust Academies.

Main findings

The academy has responded with urgency and determination to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Your action plan is comprehensive and realistic although success criteria are not always clear enough. You are driving through an ambitious improvement agenda with some early signs of success.

Improving the quality of teaching has high priority. This is evident from the academy's programme of professional development that involves colleagues from various departments working together to improve their practice by learning from each other. Teachers have written individual improvement plans that focus on aspects of teaching they are developing. These plans are reviewed critically by leaders and help to ensure that the academy's improvement priorities are understood and acted upon at all levels.

Professional development for subject leaders is underway through a well-considered coaching programme led by the vice principals. This is having a positive impact on leaders' confidence by supporting their reflection and encouraging solution-finding. Subject leaders are acting with rigour to raise standards. They show a high degree of commitment to the academy and are keen to share each other's practice, however they recognise that much can be learned by looking outside to schools with notable records of success in challenging circumstances.

Monitoring activities, including the scrutiny of students' work and regular unannounced visits to lessons have been undertaken by senior leaders and subject leaders. These indicate a higher degree of consistency in the work of teachers in different departments, for instance in the use of marking to improve students' literacy levels and in the presentation of opportunities for students to respond to teachers' feedback. The outcomes of monitoring activities are being acted upon and rechecked. The rigour of these activities is having a noticeable effect on ensuring that staff have increasingly shared high expectations of what students can and should achieve. Students comment that teachers' demands in lessons have risen, and that more is expected from them in the standard of presentation of their work and in their completion of tasks.

The management of students' behaviour has been strengthened considerably. Students acknowledge that good behaviour is positively rewarded and that sanctions are clearly understood. A system of detentions has been introduced that enables students to reflect

with subject teachers on any misbehaviour or poor work during lessons and iron out difficulties promptly. The number of incidents that disrupt learning because of poor behaviour has been reduced. Students know that there are agreed sanctions for failure to comply with the academy's rules, and in the main, they respect these.

Improvements in students' attitudes are evident in their pride in wearing the academy's uniform smartly, better punctuality, and the generally calm behaviour in classrooms and around the site. The management of behaviour on corridors has been reviewed and staff have been deployed at key times of the day to promote good behaviour and speak with any students who are experiencing difficulties.

Staff report that morale is high and that autumn 2013 has been 'the best ever start to the year.' Girls' achievement rose in summer 2013, particularly in mathematics where the proportions of students making progress were much closer to national figures than had previously been the case. There is a real will to beat this record in 2014. Girls' attendance has risen and is similar to that found nationally. Greater stability in staffing adds to the positive culture; new members of staff and those returning from maternity leave are very praising of the excellent induction support they have received.

The obstacle to sustained improvement of the academy is uncertainty regarding its strategic leadership. The academy's future trust arrangements are unclear. Staff continue to work hard despite this vacuum but there is potential for improvement to be derailed. Governors' first attempt to recruit a substantive principal has been unsuccessful. You are working very hard and are successfully holding the senior team together but you are conscious that this is an interim arrangement.

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

External support

Valuable support has been provided by SPTA to strengthen the academy's action planning, support staff development and advise on improvement strategies. An SPTA consultant has continued to quality assure the academy's self-evaluation processes. While this support has provided clear benefits, its sustainability is jeopardised by the lack of resolution surrounding trust arrangements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Manchester, The Education Funding Agency and the Academies' Advisers' Unit.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector