

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite22
West Lancashire
Skelmersdale

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 863
Direct F 01695 729 320
jbennett@ofsted.gov.uk



17 January 2014

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

Dear Ms Towey

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Unity City Academy

Following my visit with Her Majesty's Inspector John Young, and additional inspectors Frank Cain and Jim Hill to your academy on 16 January, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the decline in achievement in English and mathematics in 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, students and a representative from the academy sponsor, Academies Enterprise Trust.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The quality of leadership and management is good.

Context

There are currently 671 students on roll, aged 11 to 16 years. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals and supported by the pupil premium is around 80%, much higher than average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average and rising.

The academy has been sponsored since January 2012 by the Academies Enterprise Trust. Since the previous inspection in March 2013, there have been no staff changes.

Achievement of pupils

Students join the academy with attainment that is well below that expected for their age. Overall, during their time at the academy, students make good progress in a range of subjects and their attainment in their best eight subjects is significantly above the national average. A similar picture is evident for all key groups of students, including those supported by pupil premium funding and those with additional learning needs.

However, in 2013, examination results and progress measures for Year 11 students in English and mathematics fell and this, in turn, resulted in a smaller proportion of students, than in the previous year, attaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics.

As a result, the academy has reviewed fully the quality and accuracy of assessment data, the quality of provision and the work of key leaders in these subject areas. A number of actions have been taken to bring about improvement. These include: extensive internal and external moderation of the academy's data and students' work; greater rigour in matching lesson observations and achievement information; targeted support for individual teachers, and for those students whose literacy and numeracy skills require bespoke intervention.

The academy's current assessment information indicates that Year 11 students are now on course to increase the proportion attaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics in 2014. Similarly, current progress data shows an increasing proportion of students making expected or better progress in English and mathematics.

This is wholly consistent with the quality of learning observed by inspectors in lessons. Effective teaching allowed students to make accelerated progress, and this

was notably consistent across subjects and year groups. Further evidence in students' workbooks confirmed this improving picture.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors observed a sample of lessons across all year groups. The quality of teaching in nearly all lessons was good, with some examples of outstanding practice. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics matched that seen in other subject areas. As a result, students were able to make accelerated progress in these lessons.

In all lessons, students engage well with their teachers, have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do their best. Teachers have high expectations and know their students well. Literacy is promoted across the curriculum, activities are well matched to students' abilities and teachers use questioning well to assess students' understanding and challenge their thinking. As a result, students are given every opportunity to succeed and are able to make at least expected progress, including in English and mathematics.

Regular marking of students' work is also evident, with examples of helpful comments on how students can improve further. Although, secure in English and mathematics, academy leaders recognise that this is not yet wholly consistent in all subject areas.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well in lessons, at social times and when moving around the academy site. They fully understand the academy's expectations for behaviour. In lessons, students have positive attitudes to their learning, they work hard and engage well both with adults and their peers.

Students are polite and courteous to visitors and engaged very positively with inspectors. They are proud of the academy, enjoy the opportunities to take responsibility, for example, as prefects, and take pride in wearing the uniform. Older students indicate that there have been significant improvements over recent years.

Students feel safe in the academy and indicate there is little bullying and that incidents are dealt with effectively. Those students, at risk of exclusion, are very well supported in the Springboard unit. The importance of safety in practical lessons is well understood and was observed by inspectors. All safeguarding requirements are met.

The academy has continued to work hard, using an extensive range of focused strategies, to improve attendance, particularly of those students with a poor track record. As a result, attendance is improving, with a decline in the number of

students who are persistently absent. However, academy leaders recognise there is still more to do in this area.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Principal provides the academy with clear strategic leadership, promoting an ethos of inclusion and achievement. Expectations throughout the academy are high and leaders and staff have a strong sense of their role in the academy's drive for continual improvement.

Systems to check the quality of teaching and students' achievement are extensive and rigorous, as are the academy's performance management arrangements. Teachers and leaders are held fully to account for students' performance. Senior and middle leaders have a secure understanding of their individual and collective responsibility for the academy's overall effectiveness.

As a result, following a comprehensive review of the academy's 2013 performance, academy leaders, including the governing body, were able to respond swiftly and effectively, with students' achievement outcomes expected to improve significantly in 2014.

Achievement across the academy is also continuing to strengthen. The focus on good teaching, effective literacy strategies, used in all year groups, and a curriculum that raises aspirations and promotes personal development, is ensuring that achievement, including in English and mathematics, is accelerating across both key stages.

The governing body provides effective challenge, with high levels of scrutiny of the academy's work evident. Governors have a wide range of experience, including from education, business and the community and are not afraid to take decisive steps to ensure that the academy continues to improve, including on pay progression. The collaborative work of the governing body, academy leaders and the sponsor is a real strength and enables the academy to focus sharply at all times on the improvement agenda.

External support

Academy leaders value the work of the sponsor. Good support and regular scrutiny of the academy's work is evident and this has ensured that the academy's progress is kept under constant review. The academy has benefited from developments in leadership, assessment information, the curriculum, including English and mathematics and human resources support. The academy has also commissioned external consultants, particularly to develop further the quality of teaching. The sponsor works closely with the Principal to ensure that support is proportionate to need and this is well judged.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the accelerating rate of progress across core subjects and in all year groups is maintained.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Middlesbrough, the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Angela Headon
Her Majesty's Inspector