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31 March 2014

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 28 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings. 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 second 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, governors and sponsor are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The academy should take immediate action to:

- ensure that new sponsorship arrangements are swiftly implemented so that there is a clear sense of direction, purpose and stability in the academy
- ensure that students are consistently supported to improve literacy standards
- provide support to middle leaders so that they can take effective steps to develop the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects
- ensure that students' behaviour improves through the consistent application of the academy's behaviour management policy

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the you, the three vice principals, the subject leader of English and acting subject leader of mathematics, groups of students, and a representative of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy's improvement plan and self-evaluation documents were evaluated. Joint lesson observations were undertaken with the leaders of mathematics and English and several brief visits were made to other lessons. A meeting was held with the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Finance Officer of the academy's agreed future sponsor.

Context

Since the previous inspection, that took place in October 2013, eleven teachers have departed the academy including the subject leader for mathematics and the academy's literacy co-ordinator. A further four teachers, including one of the vice principals, are leaving at the end of the spring term. Seven new staff have started. The relationship between the academy's current sponsors and the potential sponsor that was working with the academy's leaders at the time of the previous monitoring inspection was discontinued. An agreement has very recently been reached with the appropriate authorities that Bright Futures Educational Trust will take over the sponsorship of the academy.

Main findings

The academy's development has stalled since the previous monitoring inspection. Uncertainty over the sponsorship arrangements and future direction of the academy has created unease that has had a corrosive effect on morale, recruitment and retention of staff. Several key teachers have left, sometimes to take promoted posts elsewhere. Turbulence in staffing has had a negative impact on the learning of groups of students, despite the best efforts of the senior leaders to create sufficient stability to raise standards. A lack of communication between the current sponsors and the academy's leaders has led to time and energy being wasted on developing plans that may not be implemented.

While some higher-attaining girls are making strong progress from their relative starting points, others are floundering, particularly in English. The attitudes and behaviour of a significant minority of older girls do not bode well for success; too many have become disengaged and on occasions, blatantly disrespectful. Some students arrive late to lessons without good reason and are unconcerned when challenged about this. Frequent changes of staffing have led to some students finding and exploiting inconsistent practice in behaviour management. The academy's leader of behaviour continues to work hard to minimise disruption and intervenes with some success to support students who have particular social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Additional staff are being appointed to monitor behaviour on the academy's corridors.

There are examples of strong teaching leading to good progress. Some students were observed making good progress in an English lesson, where they were highly engaged in analysing the motives and relationships of characters in *An Inspector Calls*. The teacher's detailed planning and clear understanding of students' skills enabled her to build rapidly on their knowledge by learning from each other. Some other classes have not had consistently good teaching and have lost their enthusiasm for learning. Some students show an unwillingness to write at length.

Students state that learning in mathematics is generally stronger. They enjoy practical approaches in mathematics lessons and see the relevance of their homework, which they generally complete. Younger students appreciate the new mathematics homework books that enable them, and their parents, to gauge their success. Year 7 students quickly gained understanding of elevation drawings and understood how these were relevant in a real life context because their teacher had planned an interesting sequence of activities that really probed their thinking. Students' progress is stronger in mathematics than in English, but there is still inconsistency in the quality of teaching, including in marking that is of variable effectiveness. Students state that the quality of their learning in other subjects is very mixed, and the academy's own monitoring records confirm this to be the case; not enough teaching is consistently good.

Many students have relatively weak literacy skills. Some teachers encourage a focus on the meaning of words and numerous posters around school give advice on writing. The identification and correction of students' spelling, grammar and punctuation in their books is inconsistent and students do not have good strategies for broadening their own expressive vocabulary; this impacts on their success in English. Too many students present their work poorly. There is very little evidence of students' work displayed throughout the academy to give them positive models of good practice.

Leaders have proved themselves to be resilient in coping with uncertainty and change. They have worked selflessly to provide an acceptable education for students in very difficult circumstances. They have plugged gaps as staff have left and provided support to new recruits, including those who are in the academy on a temporary basis, but constant fire-fighting and a climate of uncertainty have hampered any strategies to embed longer-term development. Teachers have individual plans to improve their performance and these are monitored and adjusted systematically. There have been improvements in the work of individual teachers, but these are not yet manifested in students making the accelerated progress that would lead to a significant rise in attainment.

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

The academy has received virtually no external support since joint working with the previous intended sponsor ceased. The vice principals have continued to attend local leaders' cluster meetings and have provided coaching and development in-house for teachers but there has been no sharing of good practice or moderation of students' work or of quality of teaching beyond the academy.

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 Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector