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Mr Matthew Wood

Principal

University of Chester Academy Northwich

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Dear Mr Wood

Special measures monitoring inspection of University of Chester Academy Northwich

Following my visit to your academy on 19 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection meetings were held with the Principal, members of the Senior Leadership Team, a group of middle leaders, the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee and representatives of the University of Chester Multi Academy Trust. A learning walk of the academy was conducted with the Principal. The academy's improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Following a review, governance has been restructured. A Statement of Action Committee replaced the previous governing body in March 2014. This committee is chaired by a highly experienced National Leader of Governance. Its membership will

shortly be augmented by practitioners in leadership and teaching to strengthen its ability to assess the academy's progress and to support and challenge academy leadership. The headteacher of an outstanding secondary school will in June 2014 also take up responsibility as Executive Principal for all the secondary academies within the University of Chester Multi Academy Trust. The Executive Principal will have a significant focus on overseeing improvement at the Northwich Academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The academy improvement plan is focused on the areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. However, the plan requires modification so that key milestones are established by which the impact of actions can be measured and checked against targets to ascertain ongoing progress. Realistic targets, performance indicators, milestones and the review and evaluation of actions are not sufficiently sharp and clear. Academy leaders need milestones within the improvement plan that offer periodic opportunities to reflect and evaluate upon the progress made and, where progress is not accelerating as expected, to take the necessary measures to ensure it does. The academy improvement plan also requires greater clarity with regard to the features of teaching and learning that need to be improved and actions required to bring about that improvement. These actions should be clearly linked to relevant professional development. The capacity of senior leadership requires further strengthening and the plan should clearly outline the stages and the way and means by which this will be achieved and evaluated.

The Principal and senior leaders have begun to implement aspects of the improvement plan. A partnership has been established with an outstanding secondary school. This has provided new opportunities to improve teaching and learning. Systems that enable more effective monitoring and tracking of the academy's work have been standardised and strengthened. The use of data at senior and middle management levels to assess student progress and identify learning needs is improving. Focused training for staff has been conducted to enable them to meet the learning needs of all students better. Data training has strengthened teaching staff in relation to class data and the planning of learning. There has been a stronger focus on improving the quality of marking. Fortnightly audits of student exercise books are undertaken by senior and middle leaders. Learning walks of the academy are regularly undertaken by senior staff. Plans are in place for the further strengthening of the senior leadership with the appointment of a Vice-Principal for September 2014 and an Assistant Principal (on a fixed two-year contract) with a special focus on developing the leadership of middle managers. Crucially, all these changes and subsequent improvements must have an impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning and accelerating the progress that all students make. There continues to be strong support and action by the trust to support Northwich Academy's journey towards improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The governing body's statement of action is fit for purpose subject to the actions required above.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose subject to the actions required above.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector