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Mr Paul Carter
Acting Principal

Manchester Creative and Media Academy for Boys and Manchester Creative and
Media Academy for Girls
300 Victoria Avenue East
Blackley
Manchester
M9 7SS

Dear Mr Carter

**Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Manchester Creative and
Media Academy for Boys / Requiring improvement monitoring inspection
of Manchester Creative and Media Academy for Girls**

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 2014 with Drew Crawshaw, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the boys' academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in June 2013, and the third monitoring inspection since the girls' academy was judged to require improvement during a simultaneous inspection. A joint monitoring inspection has been made to both academies on this occasion because they are now functioning as a co-educational academy. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the boys' academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weakness designation. Also, senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement in the girls' academy that were identified at the last section 5 inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Sponsor, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Strategic Director of Children's and Commissioning Services for Manchester and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspections which took place in June 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that a greater proportion is at least good, leading to more rapid progress and raised attainment, for all groups of boys and for middle and higher-attaining girls, especially in English, mathematics and sciences by:
 - planning lessons that are tailored to the different attainment levels of students
 - providing more opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills
 - ensuring that tasks are engaging and challenge students
 - using questioning more effectively so that students develop their reasoning and extend their thinking by giving more developed answers
 - fostering good literacy skills in subjects across the curriculum
 - challenging students to present their work carefully.

- Improve behaviour to be good by:
 - ensuring that the academy's code of conduct is consistently applied in all lessons and around the academy
 - improving punctuality to lessons so that learning time is not wasted.

- Improve leadership by:
 - ensuring that all staff who are returning to the academy from maternity leave, as well as those new to post, receive appropriate induction, including with regard to co-educational teaching, so that their contribution to achievement is immediate
 - strengthening the role of subject leaders in improving the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that swift action is taken by subject leaders to address areas of underperformance in teaching apparent through monitoring.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on July 3 2014

Evidence

Inspectors met with the acting principal and the two vice-principals, four members of the governing body, several teachers and groups of students. A meeting was also held with the director of secondary education for the Bright Futures Educational Trust (BFET) and with two other members of this trust, who have been giving leadership support to the academy over the last half term. Visits were made to 10 lessons and students' behaviour was observed around the site. A range of documents was considered, including improvement plans and records relating to the achievement of students in the academy. A selection of students' work books covering most subjects was scrutinised and the academy's procedures to safeguard students were considered.

Context

There have been further significant changes to staffing since the monitoring inspection that took place in March 2014. Nineteen teachers and nine other staff have left the academy, or will do so at the end of the summer term. Some of these departures are due to staff securing posts elsewhere; others are due to retirement or as a result of a staffing restructure. Eight new teachers have been appointed along with a new finance director and a vice-principal. Most of these staff will join the academy in September 2014. The process of transferring sponsorship of the academy to BFET is underway and two interim co-principals from BFET, who have been working closely with the academy, will lead it from 1 September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Improvements in students' achievement are fragile and too slow. Boys continue to make much less progress than girls and their achievement in 2014 is likely to be below the government's floor standard that sets minimum expectations for achievement and progress. The vice-principal has worked tirelessly to track and raise students' performance but the enormity of this task has been too great against a backdrop of relentless staffing changes in key subjects. The academy's self-evaluation does not make sufficient connection between students' progress over time and the quality of teaching; consequently, it presents an over-optimistic view of the academy's current provision.

The acting principal has continued to lead the academy since it failed to recruit a successor earlier in the year. He has spent much of his time trying to ensure stability since the academy's original sponsors announced their withdrawal and a new sponsor has undertaken necessary due diligence work. There has been much speculation among staff, students and the wider community that has inevitably

diverted energy from securing improvement. The work of the governing body has been compromised by a blurring of the roles of Chair and acting principal.

Leaders have not been able to secure sufficient improvement in the quality of teaching overall in the academy. Some teachers are very strong and secure good progress for students. The academy's leaders recognise their strengths and have tried to link them with colleagues so that good practice can be shared, but this strategy has had limited impact on students' achievement because staffing changes have been so frequent. As one student stated, 'it can be difficult to learn if you have to start off by telling your teacher what topics you have covered.' In classes where there has been greater continuity and consistently high expectations, students are making better progress.

Since the beginning of June, leadership has been strengthened by two leaders from BFET who have worked in the academy as consultants. They have brought rigour to the monitoring of behaviour as a result of which there has been a considerable reduction in truancy and a better climate for learning in the academy. They have reintroduced the student council and begun to monitor the quality of teaching. Staff and students have commented very favourably on recent changes and are keen to make a new start under direct and clear leadership in the autumn term. This leadership will include structured professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop their skills and to work in collaboration with staff from other academies. The current governing body will be dissolved on 31 August 2014 and new governance arrangements will be established.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Despite the many difficulties that have beset the academy in the last year, staff have confidence in its future development and are committed to doing their best for students.
- There is an encouraging picture of improving achievement in mathematics, where work has been done to secure more engaging learning. Students enjoy work that involves problem solving in real contexts. The acting head of mathematics has challenged and celebrated colleagues' practice, leading to some tangible improvements.
- Behaviour management has been strengthened. Leaders now focus effectively on patterns of behaviour and are taking more effective action to ensure that students conduct themselves well. Students' break times have been adapted to minimise disruption to learning and more activities have been provided so that students have enjoyable social times.
- Leaders have developed the quality of teaching of some individual teachers. Peer observations enable teachers, including those who are new to the school, to observe good practice.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Governance has not been effective in raising standards during the last year as the strategic work of committees has diminished. Governors have been frustrated that the academy has stalled during a period without a substantive leader and with uncertainty, until recently, regarding its sponsorship. There has been a recent improvement with regard to governors' involvement in behaviour management. However, governors' skills have not been used effectively to challenge leaders' underperformance.
- Leaders have been unable to ensure consistently good teaching for students. Students' books show variability in standards of work when teachers have changed. Students have been frustrated by frequent staffing changes and admit that they sometimes 'play up' for new teachers.
- There has been insufficient attention to detail in the monitoring undertaken by senior and middle leaders. A clear and sensible marking policy has been introduced but its implementation has been inconsistent and, consequently, it has not had the desired effect on improving students' literacy skills. Similarly, initiatives such as 'Drop Everything and Read' have not been consistently adopted across year groups, despite this being leaders' intention. The energy that some of the academy's leaders have injected into improving literacy levels has been dissipated. Some teachers provide incorrect models of language use to students. The books of higher attaining students are often marked to a better standard than those of lower attainers.
- The learning environment has not been fully developed or exploited. In some classrooms, there are clear prompts for learning and evidence of students' work being celebrated, but this practice is not consistent either within or across subjects.
- Some staff feel that there has been insufficient communication, particularly about the most recent staffing restructures. Unease has had an enervating effect on some people's work.

External support

The academy received no external support until its potential sponsors, BFET, began intensive work in June 2014, initially on a consultancy basis. The two leaders who have joined the academy from BFET have quickly begun to drive it forward again, in conjunction with the two substantive vice-principals.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure effective governance arrangements.
- Ensure that all members of the academy understand its vision and priorities, and their part in securing improvement.

- Rigorously monitor and objectively evaluate the impact of the academy's work to improve the quality of teaching and learning.