

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566857

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jkinsman@cfbt.com



8 December 2014

Mr Andrew Farren
Interim Principal
University Academy Liverpool
Dingle Vale
Liverpool
Merseyside
L8 9SJ

Dear Mr Farren

Special measures monitoring inspection of University Academy Liverpool

Following my visit with John Leigh, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 4 and 5 December 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee, which acts as the local governing body, and the Director for Children and Young Peoples Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or outstanding so that students make at least good progress that is sustained over time and standards rise throughout the academy, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of information on students' previous learning and build on this more effectively to increase the progress they make in lessons and over time
 - raising expectations of what students are capable of achieving, particularly boys, those who are most able and those whose first language is not English
 - using homework, marking and verbal feedback consistently and effectively to stretch students to achieve more and improve the presentation of their work
 - developing further students' speaking and listening skills across the curriculum, for example, through effective questioning to promote more extended responses that demonstrate their understanding
 - reducing levels of staff absence.

- Improve the impact of leadership and its ability to secure improvements across the academy, including in the sixth form, by:
 - increasing the rigour and accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures, including the use of information on the performance of all cohorts of students
 - holding all those in leadership positions fully to account for the impact of their work on students' achievement and on the performance of other staff at all levels
 - ensuring that staff fully understand and subscribe to the leadership's vision for the academy's improvement, including its proposals for a staffing restructure to maintain its financial viability
 - developing further the skills of the governing body to understand and use data effectively to ask more searching questions about the achievement of different groups of students
 - reviewing the quality and range of subjects that the academy provides in order to better meet the interests and needs of all students.

- Improve students' behaviour so that it makes a more positive contribution to their progress, by:
 - eliminating any off-task misbehaviour in lessons and tutorial times by encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own good attitudes to learning, whether or not they are with their regular teachers
 - increasing students' levels of interest and involvement in lessons, and promoting a love of learning
 - further raising students' attendance, particularly in the sixth form.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 December 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised documents. They held meetings with the interim Principal and other senior leaders, groups of four middle leaders and other staff including four teachers and two learning coaches. Inspectors met formally with a group of nine students and had informal conversations with others during the academy's day. Meetings were held with representatives of the sponsor, a representative of the local authority and the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee (SOAC), which acts as the local governing body. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in seven lessons and an inspector visited one of the partners offering alternative provision for students at the academy. On the second day of the inspection, inspectors observed training day activities for teachers, which formed part of the academy's programme to improve teaching and learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three assistant Principals and seven other members of teaching staff together with the data manager have left the academy. Two interim assistant Principals joined the academy; one at the start of the school year and one shortly before the autumn half-term break. A number of members of staff have long-term absence. Roughly two-fifths of teaching is being provided by teachers who have temporary roles in the academy.

A new approach to the pastoral and learning support of students has been introduced with four learning coaches and three student engagement officers being appointed.

Entry to the sixth form was suspended in September 2014 with no Year 12 students joining the academy.

Lunchtime arrangements have been reorganised and a new timetable has led to class sizes changing.

The academy's links with the teaching school have been reduced. The academy is now working closely with the local authority, which is providing support in relation to teaching and learning, and safeguarding.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students' achievement is not increasing quickly enough. The nationally published information will show that achievement has fallen dramatically. However, the data reflect issues with the academy's English results. Previous leaders did not ensure

that the combination of examinations taken in 2014 by students in Year 11 allowed all students' results in English to be included. The results attained by the individual students affected are still valid. Even when this problem is taken into account, and despite increased progress in mathematics and modern languages, overall achievement remained broadly the same as in 2013 because progress in science and humanities slowed in 2014. The overall rate of progress is well below that seen nationally and has, once again, led to achievement which does not meet the national expectations.

The progress of students seen by inspectors in lessons was insufficient to demonstrate that students are on track to achieve the results of which they are capable. Students' work in books is of a variable standard and opportunities to build this into systematic learning are often missed because marking frequently lacks the detail needed to help students learn more or, on occasion, is not done at all.

The students who spoke with inspectors commented that changes in their teachers in some subjects meant that they did not learn as well. This was of particular concern to some Year 11 students when thinking about their future GCSE success.

Senior leaders have recently introduced new approaches to tracking the performance of Year 11 students. These build on the academy's previous system and give a more precise picture of which students are likely to reach their potential and which students would benefit from additional teaching or support. While the students who may be helped by these additional actions have now been identified, the implementation of the actions is at an early stage.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is starting to improve but the rate of improvement is not fast enough to ensure that students' achievement is rapidly increasing.

The teaching and learning seen by inspectors lacked consistent effectiveness. In too many of the lessons visited, teachers' expectations were not high enough, the work set did not challenge students enough and the contribution to learning made by written work and teachers' comments on this were insufficient. Senior leaders confirmed that this broadly matched their own evaluation. Teaching in a sixth form sports science lesson was more effective with students engaging well in independent study and group discussion, as they developed their understanding of essential nutrients.

In the short time since they have been in post, senior leaders have built a shared understanding of the key priorities for teaching and learning. The action plan to improve these aspects has been generally accepted across the academy and is beginning to be implemented. Senior leaders and key middle leaders are undertaking learning walks to observe teachers' effectiveness and are scrutinising students' work.

Approaches to improving teaching are being discussed, including the use of coaching to help teachers become more effective.

The work of senior leaders, including the training being offered, is starting to improve teachers' awareness of their professional responsibilities, the need for high expectations and for students to make rapid progress. Training includes the temporary teachers working at the academy. However, the academy has not yet implemented its plans for the performance management of teachers through their formal appraisal. This means that it is harder for leaders to work with teachers to improve classroom practice and to ensure that the basic requirements of the government's Teachers' Standards are met.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

While senior leaders' raised expectations and clear setting of standards for students and staff have led to some improvements in students' behaviour, much more still needs to be achieved.

Staff supervision around the academy has been increased and includes non-teaching members of staff. When students are aware that a member of staff is nearby, their conduct is generally harmonious and considerate. However, a minority of students lack the skills to control themselves properly when they feel they are not being observed and therefore behave less well on occasion.

In lessons, students do not always maintain their concentration well enough to ensure they learn as rapidly as possible. Where teaching does not interest students sufficiently, they sometimes start to talk with each other or move around the classroom unnecessarily.

Students' attendance remains very low and, after some improvement earlier in the term, punctuality has fallen.

The arrangements for ensuring students are safe are not sufficient. The curriculum does not properly ensure that students are taught how to keep themselves safe. A review of safeguarding was completed on behalf of the sponsor by a neighbouring local authority towards the end of the summer term. The outcomes from this were not available until shortly before the start of this school year delaying their implementation. Senior leaders are now working closely with the Liverpool local authority on safeguarding and there has been rapid improvement, such as in the development of a culture of openness in discussing child protection issues and in additional teaching to ensure students understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Leaders have ensured that a number of urgent issues have been addressed. However, a number of aspects are less secure, meaning that students are not as well protected as possible. For example:

- The single central record of employment checks does not include supply teachers; the required information is held elsewhere in the academy, but quick confirmation of whether all members of staff are suitable to work with children and young people is not as straightforward as possible.
- Risk assessments in technical subjects are of inconsistent quality and do not provide clear enough information for students and staff.
- Records do not confirm that all teachers have had basic safeguarding training.
- Awareness of safeguarding issues is not raised well enough; little information is displayed to help students understand how agencies outside the academy may be able to help them or in relation to staying safe when using computers or other electronic communication.
- The academy's information on attendance is not readily available.
- The academy's policies and other safeguarding documents are not complete or signed off in every case.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Senior leadership has been strengthened with the appointment of two interim assistant Principals. Both of these appointments are recent, although senior leaders already form a coherent and determined team. There are early signs of improvement including in, for example, the quality of relationships in the academy, a developing culture which is committed to ensuring students do as well as possible, the use of data on students' achievement, the sixth form and aspects of child protection. However, these developments are at an early stage and much still needs to be done, in particular, in improving the quality of teaching and in safeguarding students.

Senior leaders know where the academy is most effective and where provision needs most improvement. While their self-evaluation is generally accurate, the summary relating to the quality of teaching in the academy improvement plan is too generous. Their vision for the future of the academy has been shared and action to ensure it is achieved has started to be taken, for example, in the restructuring of support for students and in challenge to less effective teachers. While teachers are increasingly being held to account, the academy's planned appraisal system has not been implemented because of the sponsor's concerns about teachers' possible reactions to such systems across the multi-academy trust (MAT).

Some middle leaders are relatively inexperienced; further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that all leaders can make a full contribution to the rapid improvement needed.

The leadership of provision for students with disabilities or special educational needs has started to improve. A consultant brokered directly by the academy works two days each week with the special educational needs coordinator. New plans and procedures have been prepared but these have not yet been fully adopted. Arrangements to provide education for students who had previously dropped out of

the life of the academy are now in place and some older students who had previously not attended are now being far better prepared for their futures.

Local governance is in place through the recently formed SOAC which is systematically reviewing progress on the academy's improvement plan. This plan which follows a model provided by the MAT was rewritten by the Principal and serves as the sponsor's statement of action. While the actions covered are appropriate and are supported where necessary by additional plans containing more detail, it remains not fit for purpose. This is because it focuses too much on the earlier stages of the next year, does not specify the timing of actions precisely enough, lacks sufficient detail on how the completion of actions will be monitored and their effectiveness evaluated and is not demanding enough in some of its targets.

The review of the pupil premium (additional government funding provided to support the achievement of disadvantaged students) expected by the end of last term was delayed and is now due to be completed by the end of this term. This delay has made it harder for leaders to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged students are being properly met.

External support

The sponsor's work with the academy has not secured the rapid improvement required. Its statement of action remains not fit for purpose. The academy improvement plan serves as the statement of action. This is not sufficient because, in addition to the deficiencies with the plan as an academy document, it lacks important details as a statement of action, for example, concerning how it will be shared with parents and it does not identify actions which are the sponsor's responsibility rather than those of academy leaders. The single plan does not give a sufficiently precise view of the expected improvement to the academy over the whole of the two-year period from the previous inspection to the next expected inspection. In other respects too, the sponsor has not been able to provide the support and challenge academy leaders have needed. This has included the difficulties with implementation of the legally required appraisal system, and the delays to the outcomes from the review of safeguarding and the review of the pupil premium. The sponsor has ensured that the SOAC is providing local governance with a National Leader of Governance as the Chair. This was in part as a response to a review of governance across all the academies in the MAT.

Discussions have taken place between the sponsor, the Department for Education and other external organisations concerning the plans for the academy's future. An initial outcome was the decision to suspend entry to the sixth form in 2014. This was managed in partnership with the local authority and Connexions, the local careers service, to ensure that no student who had originally applied to join the sixth form was disadvantaged. More fundamental decisions about the longer-term future of the academy still have to be confirmed. This is an urgent matter as the resulting

uncertainty makes it harder for the academy to maintain the confidence of parents, attract high quality staff and to determine longer-term improvement priorities. In addition, there is a risk that key members of staff on fixed-term contracts may, in due course, decide that they should apply for longer-term posts in other schools. Any such impact would further reduce the stability of the academy and, in turn, make it harder to maintain the rate of improvement needed.

The academy has reduced its links with the teaching school attached to the MAT and is now working in much closer partnership with the local authority. These links are recent, but the new arrangements have already gained the confidence of teachers who participated with commitment to the training activities offered on the second day of the inspection.