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7 May 2015

Mr Jon Angell
Principal
The City Academy Bristol
Russell Town Avenue
Bristol
BS5 9JH

Dear Mr Angell

Special measures monitoring inspection of The City Academy Bristol

Following my visit to your academy on 7 May 2015, 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 school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and with other members of the leadership team, as well as with the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with representatives from the Cabot Learning Federation, who are providing considerable support to the academy, and held a discussion with a group of six students from Years 7, 9 and 11. We visited a small number of lessons in English and mathematics where we also looked briefly at students' work. I looked at a range of documentation, including records of the checks on teaching, minutes of the governing body and information about safeguarding, including the single central record of checks on staff suitability. The academy's action plan was also evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, the previous joint Acting Principals have both taken up posts in other schools. Since March 2015, you have been seconded to the role of Principal from your substantive position as Principal of John Cabot Academy. An Assistant Principal from Bristol Brunel Academy has also been seconded to the academy as part of a package of support commissioned from the Cabot Learning Federation. Two new governors have joined the governing body to replace two governors who have left.

The governing body has begun a process to secure a new sponsor for the academy and a period of due diligence is underway.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The identity of the long-term sponsor for the academy remains unresolved. Although a decision has been taken to broker a new sponsor for the academy, timescales are unclear. The Cabot Learning Federation, as the preferred new sponsor, is currently undertaking a process of due diligence in consultation with the Department of Education. Following the outcome of the inspection in January, the existing sponsor commissioned considerable support from the Cabot Learning Federation. This support includes your role as Principal of The City Academy, which began in March 2015. However, as you indicated, your involvement as Principal is unlikely to continue into the autumn term. Despite this uncertainty, the Cabot Learning Federation has indicated a commitment to providing support for the academy while the identity of the new sponsor is finalised, although detailed plans for how this support will be implemented and its impact checked are not yet in place. The external review of governance has not yet taken place and the review of the use of the pupil premium is scheduled for next week.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding sponsorship arrangements, you and your senior team have forged ahead with important actions to bring about improvement, and the support of the Cabot Learning Federation has made a notable contribution to this. The roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels are more clearly defined and lines of accountability have been strengthened. Your focus on improving the quality of checks on teaching and on the reliability of assessment has led to a more secure understanding of the academy's effectiveness. There is evidence that your expectations in relation to lesson planning, teaching, marking and assessment are becoming established. Staff have accepted the findings of the inspection and a commitment to the need for change is widely shared.

However, the academy action plan is built around the period of your current commitment as Principal of the academy and does not extend beyond the end of July 2015. As such, the plan is not fit for purpose as a tool to support the longer-term improvement of the academy and the removal of special measures in particular. While it has proved effective to drive improvement over the period of your involvement, the uncertainty over the future sponsor of the academy has led to a focus on short-term priorities. This is also seen in weaknesses in the contribution of the governing body to improving the academy. The sponsor has not written an appropriate statement of action, or taken sufficient steps to strengthen the impact of governors, including holding academy leaders rigorously to account for the pace of improvement. Governance structures have not been reviewed in the light of inspection findings and many of the weaknesses in governance identified at the previous inspection persist.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. (The sponsor has not written a statement of action.)

The academy's action plan is not fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for the City of Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector