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26 March 2015

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 Alan Parkinson, additional inspector, to your academy on 24 and 25 March 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 fit for purpose.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). However, NQTs employed and supported by the sponsor may be deployed at the academy.

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 third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised documents. They held meetings with the interim Principal and other senior leaders, groups of five middle leaders and other staff including three teachers and two learning coaches. Inspectors met formally with a group of seven students and had informal conversations with others during the academy's day. Meetings were held with a representative of the sponsor, two representatives of the local authority and the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee (SOAC), which acts as the local governing body. An inspector spoke by telephone with the Chair of Great Schools for All Children Trust (GSAC) and the academy's Principal designate for September 2015. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 11 lessons with two of these observations being conducted jointly with senior leaders. An inspector visited one of the partners offering alternative provision for students at the academy. Inspectors examined students' books in lessons and others from a further sample. On the second day of the inspection, an inspector observed students' learning and behaviour during a full day programme of learning for Year 8 students about diversity and hate crime. This formed part of the academy's programme of personal, social and health education.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, eight teachers and three other members of staff have left the academy. Seven teachers and three others have long-term absence. In addition, seven other teachers were absent on the days of this inspection. A third interim assistant Principal and six other teachers have joined the academy for the remainder of this academy year. The amount of teaching provided by temporary teachers has increased. Some students have over half of their lessons with teachers who have temporary roles in the academy.

Agreement has been reached that the sponsorship of the academy should move from the University of Chester Academies Trust (UCAT) to GSAC from September 2015.

More students are being provided with off-site, alternative provision planned to better meet their individual needs.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' achievement has started to increase, particularly in English. However, the increases are not rapid enough across the academy. Students make less progress in mathematics than English.

Senior leaders are using information from the new systems to record and analyse students' achievement effectively to challenge middle leaders and teachers, and to identify how teachers can help students achieve more. Senior leaders are more confident in the assessment of students' work in English and mathematics because this is now checked rigorously against standards elsewhere. Consultants from the local authority have worked with subject leaders to do this. In addition, the head of English has completed IGCSE examination board training. In mathematics, examination papers which were previously unseen by teachers as well as by students have been used with Year 11. The academy's own records suggest that the achievement of the current Year 11 is increasing and that these students will be more successful than Year 11 in 2014. Academy leaders expect these students' progress in English to be in line with the expected progress seen nationally but to be less than expected in mathematics. While the academy sets demanding targets based on the expectation that students will make more progress than others nationally, too few students reach these targets because teaching is not effective enough.

The results achieved by Year 11 students in 2014 were affected by decisions made during their Key Stage 4 about the curriculum and examination entries. Year 11 students this year have had alterations to their English and science programmes during Key Stage 4; while any such change can reduce achievement, these changes have been better managed with additional staffing provided to help students stay on track.

Senior leaders are aware of the risk that the additional teaching offered and arrangements to provide more stability among teachers for Year 11 could lead to slower progress in other year groups. Current tracking indicates that Year 10 students are reaching higher standards than Year 11 did at a similar stage. Students in Years 7 and 8 are making faster progress than those in Year 9. In all years, students make less progress in mathematics than in English.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching remains inadequate and is not good enough to quickly bring about the required improvement in achievement. Leaders have developed a full and thorough understanding of the effectiveness of teaching. This is based on detailed evaluation of work in students' books as well as information about how much progress students are making and observation of teaching and learning in class.

The proportion of lessons taught by temporary teachers has increased with some students reporting that over half their lessons are taught by such teachers. Short-term teachers are given the information they need to ensure that students are safe. They are included in training about effective teaching and learning. However, it remains far harder for senior leaders to ensure that the quality of teaching from

temporary teachers reaches the minimum standard expected. The students and staff who spoke with inspectors agreed that the over-reliance on temporary teachers is one of the biggest challenges the academy still faces.

Students' books show that most teachers mark students' work regularly. However, this investment by teachers does not lead to the best possible learning. This is because marking still does not challenge students to think about their work sufficiently, guide students to respond or check the responses students make.

Leaders are increasingly using the better information on students' achievement to decide whether teaching should be adjusted to speed up learning. The leadership of the provision for students identified by the academy as having special educational needs has improved. The special educational needs coordinator has been allocated more time. All teachers are aware of what they need to do to ensure that such students make better progress. This information is being prepared on a rolling programme; this means that it is already available for Key Stage 4 students and will be shared for Key Stage 3 next term.

The learning needs of students attending alternative provision continue to be met. Close contact between the providers and the academy mean that the academy's leaders know what is being achieved and that the students involved are safe.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved. The overall number of recorded incidents of poor behaviour has reduced. There are fewer more serious incidents. Inspectors saw students relating well to each other around the academy. Students say they feel safe in the academy and parents who shared their views in an academy survey agree.

Students who spoke with inspectors said that there is very little bullying and that, if it does happen, leaders take action to resolve the situation. When asked by an inspector if there is any racism in the academy, a Year 10 student confidently, and with some pride, replied, 'No, this isn't that kind of school.' However, the academy's own records indicate that there have been instances when students have used their mobile phones to insult and upset others. These led to a rigorous response from senior leaders, which included lessons to make sure that all students are better informed about how to keep themselves safe when using electronic communication. In addition, senior leaders set up an information evening for parents so that they could better understand what the risks are and how they can help their children.

Many students try hard in lessons so that they and others can learn well. Nevertheless, students told inspectors that their behaviour is not as good when they are working with temporary teachers.

Attendance is far too low although it is now increasing as a result of the more effective action being taken by academy leaders. The new interim assistant Principal's role includes the improvement of attendance. Students have accepted leaders' and teachers' increased expectations, there is greater challenge to leaders from the SOAC, and training and development in partnership with the local authority has been completed. However, attendance this year remains well below the national average for last year and persistent absence is far too high. Students will not fully benefit from the improvement in the academy until they attend regularly.

Information about how students can keep themselves safe when they are using social media and other programs online is now displayed around the academy. However, unused noticeboards could still be used to provide even more information about safeguarding. The curriculum for personal, social and health education is well planned. It includes teaching which is designed to make sure that students are able to understand the challenges and responsibilities they face growing up in Britain today. The Year 8 diversity and hate crime day on the second day of this inspection provided useful information to students. It covered a range of issues including the risks of radicalisation and extremism, and the importance of avoiding thinking about people through stereotypes. Students representing the wide range of backgrounds and experiences which make up the academy participated equally in these activities. The academy is working towards becoming a 'Rights respecting school' as part of the scheme endorsed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It has already had its commitment to this work recognised by UNICEF.

The academy's arrangements for ensuring that students are properly safeguarded are secure. Senior leaders have addressed the aspects identified on the previous monitoring inspection. The single central record of employment checks meets requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders continue to work assiduously to improve the academy. This work is now supported and challenged by effective local governance. The academy has continued to build on the early improvements previously identified in previous monitoring inspections. However, the significant challenges which remain have meant the rate of improvement is not yet fast enough particularly concerning the quality of teaching and attendance. Attendance has now started to improve more rapidly but far too many students miss out on the better opportunities the academy provides.

The Principal has worked with a consultant from the local authority to produce a new academy improvement plan. This provides a helpful framework for the improvement of the academy and is fit for its purpose. The plan also allows leaders to evaluate how much progress they are making. Further work completed with UCAT means that this document is also suitable as the sponsor's statement of action.

The increased size of the senior leadership team has allowed important tasks to be completed. For example, effective careers education and guidance have raised students' aspirations in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The support and encouragement offered to sixth-form students to apply to university have led to all those applying receiving offers of places with some from universities which have particularly demanding requirements.

Subject leaders do not have sufficient impact on improving the teaching and learning practice of their teams. They are now better held to account and supported but their work has not led to consistently rapid increases in achievement across all subjects.

Following the previous monitoring inspection, senior leaders rapidly introduced arrangements so that they could systematically judge and support the performance of teachers. Long-term teachers have clear targets which reflect the academy's priorities of improving marking, raising achievement and better engaging students. These have further raised expectations including that all teachers will, at least, meet the minimum requirements of the national Teachers' Standards. If it becomes clear that any teacher is failing to reach the expected standard, senior leaders take firm action to ensure that students do not continue to experience this less effective practice. While support and training are offered, this has also meant that some teachers have left the academy. Senior leaders recognise that this has led to greater staff turnover in the short term but judge that it has been necessary to ensure high quality teaching in the long term. Teacher absence remains too high.

Governance has been strengthened and is now effective. The work of the SOAC is well established with meetings held regularly and frequently. Leaders are properly held to account. The SOAC has helped to speed up improvement in the academy. The Chair has used frequent formal and informal contact with leaders, teachers and students to rapidly develop a clear understanding of the challenges the academy faces. Its members have increased their knowledge of the academy and provided robust challenge to senior and middle leaders. For example, they hear directly from middle leaders and then asking searching questions which investigate any aspects that are not good enough. The detailed minutes of the SOAC meetings confirm that the committee considers the most important issues including achievement, attendance, finance and the linked matters of the quality of teaching and teacher supply. While the schedule of the SOAC meetings is demanding, some members have not attended often enough to ensure that their expertise is available for the benefit of the academy and its students.

External support

Following the judgement at the first and second monitoring inspections, the Principal working in partnership with a consultant from the local authority and the sponsor

have now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy has continued to receive effective support from the local authority. This work has been resourced through the funding directly allocated to the local authority. Consultants have worked with teachers to improve teaching and learning with a particular focus on English, mathematics and science. A School Improvement Adviser has been appointed and she is developing bespoke training for teachers following detailed scrutiny of students' written work.

The support offered through the current sponsor has not always been fully effective. The review of the impact of the pupil premium by the teaching school working with UCAT which was expected shortly after the previous monitoring inspection was further delayed. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support disadvantaged students.) The review was not completed by the teaching school until January with a draft report not available until February. Academy leaders had been at the final stages of commissioning a review from elsewhere because of the delays. Opportunities were then missed for the review to be a joint developmental activity with academy leaders. Leaders are implementing a well-thought-out plan to ensure that disadvantaged students benefit fully from the additional funding. The teaching school has provided training on aspects of teaching and learning. These have covered broad topics; some teachers have acknowledged that this has been helpful. However, this approach has lacked the precision needed to provide teachers with the information they require to rapidly improve their individual practice.

The current sponsor has made a commitment to work closely with the new sponsor over the transition period. A new representative of UCAT on the SOAC has been appointed because roles within UCAT centrally are changing.

The new sponsor has already started its work with the academy. A new Principal has been appointed. He is expected to join the academy in September 2015. The Chair of GSAC is aware of the issues the academy faces and is ensuring that these are considered as the plans for September onwards are developed. For example, GSAC is investigating how it can secure a full team of high quality teachers. All involved in the transition are aware of the importance of providing as much stability as possible for students despite the changes that will happen. The interim Principal will continue to work at the academy on a part-time basis alongside the new Principal for the first term of the next school year.