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24 June 2015

Mrs Helen MacKenzie OBE

Principal

Salford City Academy

Northfleet Road

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Dear Mrs MacKenzie OBE

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Salford City Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 23 June 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation. It is my recommendation that the next inspection of the academy be carried out under the provision of section 5 of the Education Act.

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

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014**

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good across all subjects, to ensure students make the progress of which they are capable, by:
  - planning work that provides the right level of challenge for students and engages them fully in their learning
  - improving the quality of marking across all subjects giving students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve
  - providing more opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills to enable them to talk more effectively and confidently about their work, and to use standard English
  - making more effective use of teaching assistants to support teachers in the classroom and students' learning.
  
- Improve progress and raise attainment in mathematics by ensuring that students have a greater understanding of mathematical processes and can apply their skills more effectively.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
  - developing the role of subject leaders in improving the quality of teaching and raising students' achievement in their subjects so as to make a more effective contribution to the academy's performance
  - checking more rigorously that any additional support for groups of students accelerates their progress, particularly those supported by the pupil premium
  - ensuring that the actions to improve the sixth form and post-16 student outcomes are clear and specific in the academy development plan.

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

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 June 2015**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the sponsor, United Learning. A meeting was held with a group of students. Short visits to a range of lessons in the different subjects were conducted, including one of mathematics, with senior leaders. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including: self-evaluation and improvement plans; data relating to students' attainment and progress; information on attendance; documents and records about behaviour and safeguarding and records of the monitoring of teaching and learning.

### **Context**

No substantive changes have occurred since the last monitoring inspection.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the academy**

This is a much improved and improving academy. The Principal and senior leaders have continued to embed and hone improvement strategies and practices since the last monitoring inspection. Senior staff are active and influential leaders of improvement throughout the academy. Tracking and monitoring systems are now well embedded into academy practice. Data systems are thorough, effective and inform classroom planning. At all levels of staffing there is a very strong focus on student progress. The academy is exceptionally well lead by a highly experienced principal who applies a rigorous but sensitive approach to performance management.

Current academy data indicate a continued and rapidly rising trend in the percentage of students in Year 11 and 10 making expected progress in English and mathematics. Current academy estimates for the percentage of present Year 11 students gaining GCSE five A\* to C including English and mathematics indicate a significant increase. However, this is still expected to remain below the national average for this indicator. Current academy tracking data also indicate that there will be significant improvements in the percentage of students attaining grade C and above in other GCSE subjects, such as single sciences, arts, technology, Spanish, history and geography. The gap between the attainment and progress made by disadvantaged students when compared with their peers has narrowed significantly. In English the percentage of students at Key Stage 4 making better than expected progress was in line with the national average in 2014 and current academy data suggests that this will continue in 2015. In mathematics the percentage of students at Key Stage 4 making better than expected progress remains below the national average although current academy data would indicate that this gap is narrowing. The academy has established strong partnerships with other schools to check, moderate and validate its assessment, examination practice and progress data.

Current academy data indicate that at Key Stage 3 students are making good progress across a wide range of subjects. Progress in English and mathematics is good. Students are tested for their reading ages on arrival in Year 7. Those who have a reading age below their chronological age are placed on improvement programmes. Academy data show that students receiving intervention improve their reading ages significantly. The academy also places a strong emphasis on the creation of an active reading culture among its students. The library is well used and is becoming a fulcrum for reading and further study. Academy leaders wish to extend and embed this culture further. The academy oracy strategy is also beginning to have an impact. Students demonstrate greater confidence in lessons in asking questions and in exploring and developing ideas. Extra-curricular activities, such as debating and the development of representational responsibilities for students, have contributed to the growing confidence of students both generally and in learning. This development has been further aided by a strong teacher classroom focus on improving the quality of questioning and answering so as to elicit deeper student understanding and reasoning.

The quality of teaching and learning continues to be supported by good and well targeted continuous professional development programmes for staff. During the short visits to lessons, the inspector noted in particular a strong focus on planning for students' progress so as to enable all learners to be involved and develop their depth of understanding better. Thus, both staff and students are gaining the confidence to explore learning through good extended questioning and challenging and well planned learning activities. Senior leaders recognise that this requires further development but agreed that a sea change in attitudes has occurred. Students also reflected on and confirmed this change in their discussions with the inspector. Student work is marked regularly with good teacher pointers to the next learning steps; students have responded well to this approach.

Student behaviour observed during this monitoring inspection was good. Students are very orderly and the academy is a well regulated learning community. Students show a pride in their uniform and are smart. They are polite and engage appropriately and well with teachers and other adults. They are increasingly keen to participate in academy life and get the very best they can from the learning opportunities offered. They are also increasingly ambitious for the next steps in education and the world of work.

The academy governing body continues to demonstrate strong support for senior leaders. Its members recognise the challenges the academy faces both in location and historically in advancing, embedding and further promoting the quality and success of its provision. Governors are highly ambitious for the academy. They robustly challenge academy performance across all aspects of its work.

### **Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:**

- a strong aspirational and improvement culture is promoted by the Principal and embraced by senior leaders, middle managers and students alike
- a well-focused development programme for middle leaders is promoting the ways and means for them to understand best their responsibilities accountabilities and role as motivators within their areas of responsibility.
- a strengthening of careers education at both key stages is enabling students to have a more comprehensive appreciation of possible destination choices and the world of work
- the academy has effective and well-developed improvement planning with appropriately timed milestones to ascertain the degree of ongoing progress
- the academy has a good working relationship with the local authority.

### **Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:**

- while students are making better progress in mathematics academy leaders recognise that the rate of this progress needs to be further accelerated.

### **External support**

The academy continues to receive strong support from the sponsor, United Learning. For example, the family of academies are working together to produce a curriculum and assessment model for Key Stage 3, part of which will be implemented in September 2015. United Learning also provides numerous opportunities for the academy to develop its educational offer in the wider context. The academy has also established good working partnerships with a number of schools outside the United Learning family.