

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 566 937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com

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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 Andrew Henderson, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 23 and 24 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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.

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 People's 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 June 2015.

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 four other teachers. Inspectors met formally with a group of eight students and had informal conversations with others during the academy's day. Meetings were held with a representative 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. An inspector spoke by telephone with the Chair of Great Schools for All Children Trust (GST) and the academy's Principal designate for September 2015. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons. Inspectors examined students' books in lessons and others from a further sample jointly with a senior leader.

This inspection took place after Year 11 had left the academy having completed their GCSE and other examinations.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, seven teachers and four other members of staff have left the academy. On the days of the inspection roughly one-fifth of lessons were taught by temporary teachers with long-term placements in the academy and a further fifth by short-term temporary teachers.

The expected transition date for the change of sponsor from the University of Chester Academies Trust (UCAT) to GST has been confirmed as 1 September 2015. GST has already started its work with the academy by appointing new members of staff. The new sponsor expects all teaching posts to be filled by permanent members of staff for the start of the autumn term. At the same time, a new Principal and senior leadership team will take on responsibility for the academy and new governance arrangements will be put in place.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The increases in achievement identified in the previous monitoring inspection have continued. However, overall achievement remains too low and achievement in mathematics still lags behind that in English. Disadvantaged students achieve as well as other students in the academy.

The achievement of Year 11 students increased rapidly in the period leading up to their GCSE and other examinations. The academy's own data indicate that students are expected to do much better in their examinations than students in Year 11 in 2014, attaining results which are around the minimum standard expected nationally in 2014. The academy's final assessment of Year 11 students' progress indicated

that it was a little faster than the national average in English, but slower than this in mathematics.

The recent rapid increases in Year 11 students' achievement followed carefully planned additional teaching and individual support for each student from a team of senior leaders and other teachers. However, the transfer of experienced teachers from their work with students in other years to give Year 11 students this final boost before their examinations meant that progress in other years of the academy slowed. This is a particular concern to Year 10 students. As Year 11 classes are no longer required, leaders are now ensuring that the additional time available from teachers is used to speed up other students' learning. For example, where possible, class sizes have been reduced and individual support is being provided for Year 10 students. Leaders understand that more effective teaching over time is needed to ensure consistently rapid achievement for all students.

The organisation of the GCSE examinations was systematic. This meant that students were given the best chance of doing well and their attendance during examinations was higher than for students in the past. In addition, the examination entry policy adopted by previous leaders last year, which reduced the published achievement for the academy, was no longer used. Where appropriate, students were entered for functional skills examinations in English and mathematics to ensure they gained success in an external qualification and built their confidence for other examinations.

The improved achievement of students in the sixth form has led to further confirmation of offers of university places.

The achievement seen by inspectors during observations of teaching and learning remains insufficient. Students' learning often slows when their teachers change and, in particular, when teaching is not good enough. This leads to students lacking confidence in their teachers and themselves. Many students continue to say that they would do better if they did not have so many temporary teachers. While achievement in mathematics lags behind that in English across the school, this is much less marked in Year 7. In mathematics, more Year 7 classes have had the same teacher for the whole year when compared to the classes in other year groups. Students' books indicate that, when students receive consistently high challenge from their teachers, they are prepared to try hard and their progress speeds up.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching remains inadequate. Too much lacks effectiveness and too little is good enough to ensure that students are able to close previous gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The continuing high proportion of teaching by temporary teachers who do not know the students well has a negative effect on how hard some students try and their progress.

Leaders' continuing determination to ensure that teachers must at least reach minimum standards, together with continuing training, has meant that aspects of teaching have improved. Inspectors saw more marking which gave clear feedback to students and helped them to improve their work. Teachers' higher expectations of how students should present their work are having effect. Lessons are generally characterised by good relationships between teachers and students. Where students have confidence in their teacher and the learning offered, they work hard and are able to achieve well. For example, a Year 10 physical education lesson helped students maintain their fitness and know about different exercises which can be included in training circuits; every student was challenged and contributed fully to the lesson.

In too many lessons, teachers' lack of knowledge of students' learning means work is not adjusted well enough to match their starting points. Marking often includes a comment that students' work would be 'Even better if...' but these comments are often not precise enough to help the student concerned as much as possible. In addition, behaviour management is too variable because teachers do not know students well enough to ensure that students are properly engaged in their learning. While teachers' questioning is often targeted well, opportunities to widen dialogue and engage students in discussion and collaborative work are too frequently overlooked.

Teaching for students with special educational needs has continued to improve. The clearer details of how teachers can help these students learn well are now available for students in all years. Teachers use the suggested strategies and are more active in discussing what they have done and in seeking further advice.

Teaching for students included in alternative offsite provision is effective. These students generally do well. Three Year 11 students have recently gained apprenticeships following their success on alternative provision placements and others have been able to return to a programme of normal lessons in the academy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has continued to improve. The number of incidents of serious misbehaviour has continued to fall and there have been fewer fixed-term exclusions this term. Students continue to relate to each other harmoniously. However, students do not always behave well enough in lessons and their attendance remains too low.

Students' attitudes to their learning are too variable. When teaching meets their needs, they cooperate well and work hard. However, in lessons where teaching is less effective, students tend to put in less effort and respond less well to teachers' instructions. Leaders have further developed the academy's systems to help teachers

manage students' behaviour. These include more active leadership and monitoring of the provision in the academy for the temporary withdrawal of students from lessons as a response to poor behaviour. Leaders have also recently introduced new morning registration sessions, which include students' self-review of their work and behaviour over the previous day. These sessions, at the start of each day, have also increased punctuality.

While students are good natured and generally respond well to each other, movement around the academy can still be boisterous. However, students now exhibit more self-control. The students who spoke to inspectors again confirmed that there is very little bullying and that racism and homophobia are not features of the academy. Recorded incidents of racism have declined sharply over this school year.

The use of rewards to support students' good behaviour has increased. Inspectors saw students using the recently established 'rewards room' during lunchtimes. The students who are able to use this room are those who have worked hard and behaved well. They enjoy the opportunity to socialise and take part in activities such as table tennis. They say it helps them to behave even better in the future.

The academy's programme for personal, social and health education contributes to students' good awareness of risk. Their safety has been further protected by the widespread use of posters giving information about who they can contact should they be at risk of harm.

Attendance is very low when compared to other schools nationally. Leaders have ensured that a wide range of strategies are in place to encourage students to attend regularly. These range from support for individuals and families to the issuing of penalty notices. While these have led to some improvement, particularly for those students whose absence has been greatest, further significant increases in attendance are urgently needed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders continue to demonstrate their determination for the academy to improve for the benefit of its students. They have not slackened their efforts despite the planned change of sponsor. In fact, they have put in additional work to prepare for the transition. Senior leaders have created a momentum for further improvement through, for example, their leadership of provision for students with special educational needs. Current senior leaders' work with the Chief Executive of GST and the new Principal for September has contributed to the crucial improvement of appointing a full, permanent team of teachers ready for the start of the autumn term.

Senior leaders have worked with other teachers to ensure that the actions required on the academy improvement plan are put in place. The progress on this plan is

tracked and any actions not completed as scheduled considered so that further steps can be put in place and the rate of improvement maintained. Senior leaders have ensured that their plan for the effective use of the additional pupil premium funding for disadvantaged students has been implemented. This work has been successful in ensuring that the achievement of such students matches that of others in the academy. Disadvantaged students' attendance is higher than that of other students.

Middle leadership has improved. Subject leaders clearly understand that they share accountability for the achievement of students and the quality of teaching in their subject. They have played a larger role in ensuring that teaching improves through their involvement in the academy's work to manage teachers' performance. Where the work of any teacher or leader has not met the standards required by senior leaders, firm action has continued to be taken.

The systems for ensuring the safeguarding of students are now fully robust and clearly meet requirements. Senior leaders, working with the local authority, have continued to take steps to ensure that these improve even more. For example, information for students about how they can stay safe is now very readily available. In addition, a review of the systems to check that the academy's recruitment procedures ensure that only suitable people are employed is being conducted.

The SOAC has continued to provide strong support to school leaders while, at the same time, ensuring that the academy's rate of improvement is monitored and, where necessary, challenged. In addition, it provides a link into the local wider community. Members of SOAC have a good understanding of the academy's improvement over this year and what still needs to be done.

External support

Senior leaders and other teachers have continued to work closely with the local authority, for example, in the close liaison over safeguarding arrangements. This has ensured that systems are robust. Local authority officers also continue to contribute to the improvement in teaching through training and support for subject leaders.

The arrangements for support and challenge from UCAT have changed in line with developments in the trust. UCAT has allowed leaders more freedom in judging how best to improve the academy. However, the SAOC's scrutiny and challenge is then closely monitored by the UCAT board. UCAT has continued to provide helpful advice to senior leaders about personnel matters.

Senior leaders, UCAT and GST have worked closely to ensure that the change of sponsor is as smooth as possible. As there will be a new Principal and senior leadership team, information is being shared to help the new leaders understand the academy, the challenges it continues to face and its wider community.