

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Rebecca Smith
Principal
Manchester Creative and Media Academy
300 Victoria Avenue East
Blackley
Manchester
M9 7SS

Dear Mrs Smith

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Manchester Creative and Media Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 15 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior team, and with a representative of the governing body and the current sponsor. I also held a meeting with a representative from the incoming sponsor. I paid short visits to classes and spoke to students about their work. I also met with a group of students to discuss with them the changes that have taken place in the academy since the last inspection. I scrutinised a range of documentation relating to the impact of actions leaders have taken to improve the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance at the academy. The trust's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

A number of staff have left the academy since the inspection in May 2015. This includes teaching staff and members of the senior leadership team. The trust agreed a restructuring of the senior team this September, and it now comprises the Principal, a senior vice-principal, who has oversight of teaching and achievement, and a second vice-principal with oversight of the behaviour, welfare and safety of pupils. Two higher-level teaching assistants and an integration manager were also appointed to manage the provision for pupils who attend alternative placements, or are at risk of exclusion. Eleven new teachers took up posts in September, and the academy has appointed five 'researchers in schools', who are based in the science and mathematics departments. Additional appointments to the mathematics and English departments are due to start in January 2016.

Following the inspection in May 2015, the governing body established a strategic monitoring group to monitor the progress of the academy. A new sponsor, the Co-operative Academies Trust, has been agreed by the Secretary of State. Their official sponsorship is due to start on 1 February 2016.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders continue to demonstrate convincingly that the school's capacity to improve is strengthening. There is clear evidence from this inspection that leaders' actions are having a positive impact on pupil progress and helping to improve standards across the academy.

Pupils' attainment in their GCSE examinations improved slightly in 2015. Standards fell below the national floor targets (these are the minimum expected standards for schools by the end of Key Stage 4), but were as predicted by leaders. The progress pupils made in both English and mathematics improved substantially on the previous year. Current pupils in Year 11 are on track to reach standards that are increasingly in line with the national average. Disadvantaged pupils are, on average, about a full grade behind non-disadvantaged pupils in this year group. However, this represents a narrowing of the gap on last year.

In September, leaders commissioned the local authority to audit the academy's practice in relation to attendance. This identified weaknesses in how policies were put into practice. The leader who is newly responsible for this aspect of the academy's work has now rectified these weaknesses. Attendance is recorded accurately and patterns of attendance for year groups and for vulnerable pupils are tracked and reported weekly to senior leaders. Appropriate systems for encouraging good attendance and for intervening early with individual pupils are in place. While attendance remains low in Years 8 and 10, it has improved overall by about 2% on the same time last year. Similarly, almost all year groups have improved on their attendance last year. The attendance of vulnerable groups of pupils follows a comparable, improving pattern.

Improvements to behaviour have continued. No evidence of poor behaviour was observed during this inspection, with pupils showing positive attitudes to learning in their lessons. The academy is, on the whole, a calm, positive place to be. This was confirmed by those students who spoke to the inspector and also by the quality of work in books. Academy records also show that internal sanctions, such as detentions and removal from lessons, are all reducing and internal truancy from class has fallen significantly. Leaders have set ambitious targets for reducing short external exclusions. The number of times these have been used this term has fallen on the same time last year, but they remain high.

The main exception to this positive picture is the current Year 10, where students report that lessons continue to be regularly disrupted. Students in this year group are also attending less often and making less progress than they should be. Leaders are aware of this and are committed to taking strenuous action to rectify this picture, although the full impact of these actions are yet to be evidenced.

Leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching across the academy. The vast majority of inadequate teaching has been eradicated since the last inspection. Some teachers do require additional support and records show that they respond well to this. All teachers receive high quality professional development, some of which comes from external specialist teachers. Other opportunities are led by the academy's own staff, for example in improving the application of the academy's policy on assessment. Additional adults are now used more effectively in the classroom. Teaching assistants and academic mentors work well in lessons to support learning. It was evident at this inspection that there is a greater consistency of approach across departments, which demonstrates that teachers are collaborating to improve their practice.

Following the inspection in May 2015, governors established a strategic monitoring group. This comprises a smaller group of governors with educational expertise who check regularly on the impact of leaders' actions to improve the academy. This has helped to ensure that the pace of improvement has not faltered even though the academy is set to move to a new sponsor in 2016.

Governors have acted effectively to secure the long-term leadership of the academy. They have also liaised extremely well with the new sponsor to ensure that the transition early in 2016 will cause as little disruption as possible to the academy's staff. The external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding (this is additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils) has taken place. This reported that the academy checks on the impact of this funding extremely well. Additional interventions for these pupils are now starting to have an impact on accelerating their progress across the academy.

Academy leaders have received effective external support from both the local authority (which is one of the outgoing sponsors) and from the new sponsor. This support has been well coordinated to target specific aspects of the areas for

improvement from the last inspection. For example, the forthcoming new sponsor has already invested in the academy to provide many opportunities for teachers and subject leaders to learn from expert practitioners from other schools. All the evidence points to this having a positive impact on raising expectations and increasing teachers' subject knowledge and confidence across the academy.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley

Her Majesty's Inspector