

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



19 May 2017

Ms Gemma Simon  
Principal  
Unity City Academy  
Ormesby Road  
Middlesbrough  
TS3 8RE

Dear Ms Simon

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Unity City Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 3 May 2017, 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 that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders and middle leaders. I also held a meeting with a group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 and talked to pupils in lessons and at morning break. I also met the new chair of trustees and held a telephone conversation with the trust's director of challenge and intervention. I carried out a tour of the school with a senior leader and completed my own additional observations. I also looked at work in pupils' books and folders. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, appointments have been made to provide much-needed stability at senior leadership level. The acting principal and associate vice-principal have both been permanently appointed to substantive roles. The roles of the senior leadership team have been realigned to clearly address school improvement priorities. After a review of governance in February 2017, the governing body was dissolved in March 2017 and replaced by a board of trustees who delegate specific

responsibilities to a management board. Additional appointments have been made to strengthen the behaviour and attendance team.

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

The principal has accelerated the pace of improvement since the previous inspection. She has clarified leadership roles and ensured a consistent focus on key areas for improvement. She has developed appropriate action plans and measured progress towards goals on a regular basis. While leaders and teachers are experiencing more challenge, the morale of middle leaders has increased as they value the clarity of direction and expectation they now receive.

The principal welcomes challenge and accountability; qualities she did not receive from the previous governing body whose governance was not sufficiently checked by the Academies Enterprise Trust. She actively encouraged a swift review of governance after November's inspection. As a result, the previous governing body was dissolved in March 2017 and replaced with a new board of trustees. The new board of trustees has extensive educational expertise and is chaired by an experienced headteacher who provided support to the principal in the early stages of her leadership. Lines of accountability are now much clearer and procedures more rigorous, with the chair of the trust regularly reporting on the school's progress to executives of the Academies Enterprise Trust.

Senior leaders and middle leaders are now much more actively involved in monitoring the quality of teaching, behaviour and pupils' progress. Pupils' progress is reviewed at regular intervals and curriculum leaders and directors of learning are asked to account for the progress of pupils in their subjects and year groups. Progress information is no longer taken at face value, as leaders have to provide evidence to support their judgements on progress. As a result, tracking information is becoming more reliable, enabling leaders to plan intervention and support with greater precision.

Much is being done to build the capacity of middle leaders and strengthen their ability to share good practice and hold their teams to account. Eight middle leaders have enrolled on a range of leadership programmes that are improving their capacity to lead improvement and monitor standards. External professional development is complemented by a much-improved school-based programme that is developing more customised approaches to address the needs of the school. The developmental work of the Academies Enterprise Trust has become much more visible, through direct support for middle leaders in English, mathematics and science. This has enabled leaders to develop a more accurate awareness of standards by moderating work with other schools and examination boards.

As a result of stronger partnership work and improving professional development, middle leaders are becoming more effective in holding their teams to account. The regular teaching observations introduced by senior leaders are now being completed

by middle leaders so that they are more aware of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. There are emerging signs of improvement as pupils feel that lessons are becoming more engaging, although much variance remains. Actions to support improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy across a wide range of subjects are less visible.

Improvements to the quality of teaching show that teachers are using pupils' progress and prior attainment to set more appropriate work. In history, there is evidence of more stretch and challenge for the most able pupils through tasks that encourage them to deepen the quality of their work. In mathematics, diagnostic assessments are enabling teachers to profile current abilities and devise study programmes that are more accurately pitched to suit pupils' abilities. These developments are at an early stage and more needs to be done to enforce more consistent practice.

Considerable actions have taken place to improve pupils' rates of attendance. Leaders have increased expectations and raised the thresholds for intervention and support meetings. Communication with parents is now much stronger. More than double the number of parents compared with last year attended the school's recent parents' evenings. Attendance review meetings are being used more effectively to secure better engagement with pupils and families. A new rewards system and weekly reviews give the importance of regular attendance a much higher profile. Leaders continue to provide support for vulnerable pupils to support their attendance. However, they are also not afraid to adopt more robust approaches, resulting in a significant increase in fixed-penalty notices. As a result of these initiatives, attendance has improved by over 3%. Although attendance remains below national levels, the overall trend is improving.

Similar commitment has been brought to improving standards of behaviour. Clearer systems of rewards and sanctions have been put in place. A new programme is building pupils' self-awareness with an online system recording learning attributes, such as enthusiasm and resilience. Pupils feel that learning in lessons is better as behaviour is better and that teachers are becoming more consistent in addressing unacceptable behaviour. The days lost to fixed-term exclusion have reduced by over two thirds and permanent exclusions have fallen by a similar amount. While pupils did not feel that this stricter environment had undermined their relationships with their teachers, a number did express concerns over the effectiveness with which teachers address bullying. During lesson observations, pupils demonstrated positive focus in a number of areas, including mathematics and history. Even so, lower standards were seen elsewhere and more needs to be done to securely embed new expectations and practices.

### **External support**

The Academies Enterprise Trust has intensified support since the inspection in November 2016. Subject specialists have provided support to curriculum leaders in

mathematics, English and science. Middle leaders have taken part in moderation exercises with trust schools to develop an awareness of standards in new examinations. The mathematics leader has participated in trial assessments with the trust and an examination board to develop a stronger understanding of new assessment demands. The Academies Enterprise Trust has also commissioned reviews of middle leadership and special educational needs. These reviews have already contributed to substantial investment in the training and development of middle leaders. The recent review of the use of the pupil premium grant has also contributed to a more focused use of funds to support eligible pupils. This is contributing to improving attendance for these pupils and it is helping to diminish the difference in the progress they make compared to other pupils.

The Academies Enterprise Trust has responded to the review of governance by investing considerable expertise into the new board of trustees and the additional management group. The trust has also commissioned additional objective scrutiny with improvement partners, such as the National Governance Association, to provide additional oversight of the effectiveness of its work. This process needs to continue to ensure ongoing objective scrutiny.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The academy's improvement action plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy trust, the chair of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Middlesbrough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**