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Mr George Lloyd
Executive Director
New Charter Academy
Silver Springs Campus
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Dear Mr Lloyd

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to New Charter Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Marguerite McCloy HMI to your academy on 18 and 19 May 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive director, other nominated staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Academic Board of Governors and a representative of the sponsors.

Context

The New Charter Academy opened in September 2008 in the town of Ashton-under-Lyne in Greater Manchester. It houses students from two predecessor schools, Stamford High School and Hartshead High School. The Silver Springs site houses Years 7 and 8, while the Greenhurst site houses Years 9, 10 and 11. In September 2011, the academy will move to a new campus with state-of-the-art facilities designed around its needs. The academy's sponsor is New Charter Housing Trust, a large housing association in Greater Manchester, the first such association in the country to sponsor an academy.



The academy has 1312 students currently on roll and serves a locality of significant social and economic disadvantage. Currently and historically, a combination of low aspirations, low levels of engagement and low attainment have disadvantaged the life chances for young people within the academy's local area. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs are also above the national average. About 27% of students come from homes where English is not spoken as the first language. The executive director, before taking up post, spent over a year working for New Charter Housing Trust to imbibe its approach and philosophy. The mission of the academy is 'to treat our young people as unique and encourage them to achieve more than they thought possible'. Almost all staff of the predecessor schools transferred to the academy when it opened. Staffing is currently stable and morale is high.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The standards reached by most students joining the academy in Year 7 are well below the national average; low literacy levels present a considerable barrier to learning. Examination results at Key Stage 4 in 2009 and current tracking of Year 11 and Year 10 students indicate a steadily improving trend in standards of attainment. From 2008 to 2009, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades increased by over 20% from the average in the predecessor schools to reach 68%. The proportion of students attaining this measure with English and mathematics included, has increased from 27% to 33%. Academy leaders recognise that results in this key indicator remain significantly below the national average and require further and more rapid improvement.

Effective and robust systems to track and monitor students' performance and progress are now established. Monitoring systems are used well by senior and middle managers to more effectively analyse students' progress and plan for improvement. Evidence from coursework already marked and moderated, examinations already taken, the academy tracking records and the current standards of work indicates that results at Key Stage 4 will improve further in 2010. Well-targeted intervention strategies have had a positive impact on raising performance overall and across different groups of students. These include focused work on the C/D grade borderline and popular Saturday morning 'embedding and recapping' revision sessions. There has been a significant improvement in the progress made by previously underperforming groups including boys and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Observations conducted during the monitoring visit confirmed standards to be improving.

The use of assessment data to identify and rectify students' underachievement and to inform them of what they need to know, or be able to do, to achieve their targets



has improved. However, there remains some variability in the effective use of assessment data to plan lessons.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

In discussions with students, they placed a strong emphasis on how behaviour had improved since the inception of the academy in 2008. What they described was no less than a significant cultural change, which has had a positive impact on their attitudes, application to work and opportunities. One Year 10 boy summarised the impact of this change, in referring to his sports coaching work with primary school children: 'It gives me an opportunity to give something back to the community, that's the opportunity that the sponsor and new academy has given us'. However, inspectors noted, and academy leaders agreed, that there remains some low-level disruption in some lessons. This occurs in lessons where pace is pedestrian and teachers' expectations of students are lower. In such lessons, teachers also do not emphasise consistently the academy's behaviour code for students. Exclusion rates have been reduced significantly, in part through the work of the academy behavioural unit. The academy has been removed from a persistent absence category for attendance. Attendance has improved and is now at the national average because of well-considered improvement strategies.

The tutorial programme and curriculum covers topics which promote and develop healthy attitudes and lifestyles. Students say they are well cared for, feel secure and confident within a supportive and affirming environment. Additional learning opportunities are provided after school and on Saturday mornings and have a good and committed take-up. Students are making an increasing contribution to the local community including the mentoring of primary school pupils in sport. Excursions to Manchester and London to visit museums and theatres provide increasing cultural enrichment and diversity. One student spoke of his developing involvement and appreciation of music, including the impact on him of Johann Sebastian Bach. The student voice is promoted well through a variety of representative groups.

The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observations matched the views of academy leaders in relation to the quality of teaching and learning'. While there is a 'critical mass' of good teaching to take the academy forward too much teaching remains satisfactory. Where teaching is stronger, it is marked by a brisk pace and by high expectations of students' behaviour, attentiveness to their tasks and a strong focus on improvement. Concepts are explained clearly and students' understanding of them regularly checked. Learning objectives are displayed so that students know the purpose of the lesson. Effective questioning revises learning points, maintains students' attention and encourages them to think deeply and reflectively about their answers. Group work is well planned and enhances collaborative learning skills. Time is well used. Information and communication technology is used appropriately in support of



teaching and learning. Too much teaching is characterised by the pedestrian pace in lessons. In these lessons student data is not fully utilised by teachers in lesson planning. There is too much teacher talk and opportunities are, therefore, missed to engage students more fully in their learning and to develop their speaking and thinking skills. In these lessons, low-level disruptive behaviour limits learning opportunities. In some lower set groups, support and intervention strategies to promote better individual application and learning were ineffective. This led to a loss of concentration for some students, whose behaviour became more erratic. Too much marking is of a celebratory nature and does not yet offer students clear enough or sufficient guidance on the next steps they must take in order to improve their work. Links with the academy's business and enterprise specialism are exploited by teachers in a number of lessons, but some useful opportunities to develop students' oral and presentational skills are missed.

The academy places a strong emphasis on developing students' basic literacy skills across the curriculum, most notably in Years 7 and 8 within the integrated humanities curriculum. The academy is aware of the need to fully evaluate the impact of this work when considering the organisation of these groups for the next academic year. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been re-modelled to better suit the needs of all students. Three distinctive pathways have been established to provide a more focused approach to foundation, vocational and GCSE levels. The alternative curriculum for disengaged learners has also been re-focused to provide for higher quality and more appropriate provision. The two specialisms in Business and Enterprise and in Sport are having a positive impact both within the academy provision and in developing the academy's community profile.

Links with external agencies and effective pastoral and support systems ensure that the most vulnerable and those at risk of not achieving, receive good support and make progress. The academy works well with families and with students to sustain and develop their learning. The behavioural unit allows those students who need a period of reflection to be quickly reintegrated into lessons with reinforced strategies to improve their behaviour. Robust monitoring systems ensure that each student's progress is followed carefully and, where necessary, intervention strategies are engaged. The academy special educational needs coordinator has refocused access to learning plans to provide for more student-centred reviews and students' involvement in setting targets. The inclusion panel meets regularly to review the progress of vulnerable students and to monitor the impact of strategies to promote better behaviour, application to work and progress towards targets. Students show a growing level of confidence in the academy's ability to advise them effectively.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive director of the academy articulates high expectations to which staff and students respond positively. He skilfully drives improvement and embeds ambition, creating a positive climate for the academy's continuing development and



growing capacity. The academy's self-evaluation procedures are well developed and well considered; there is an accurate recognition of both strengths and areas for improvement. Development plans are focused on key priorities for improvement, with success criteria made explicit. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the academy's work is conducted against clear success criteria. This includes the analysis of information on students' progress, recorded on a database to which all staff contribute and have access. Action is taken where potential underperformance is found.

The academy has a large and highly-committed senior leadership team well supported by middle leaders who are growing in confidence and show capability and commitment. There has been a clear drive to improve the quality of teaching. There are effective systems to regularly monitor students' work, teachers' planning and the quality of teaching and learning. The monitoring of lessons is carried out by the academy's senior leadership team. The academy's overall evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching compared accurately with that found by inspectors. Teachers are developing their skills through focused professional development and the sharing of good practice through team teaching and coaching opportunities. Staff give willingly of their time to engage in additional training opportunities that meet their professional development needs. A key feature of the academy's ethos is the staff teamwork and collegiality that has developed, ensuring that all are involved in a continuous learning process. Staff share the academy's vision of rising standards and provision of an inclusive education that seeks to bring out the potential in each individual.

The academy makes a positive contribution to the local community focused through the work of the director of community and regeneration, and the parent partnerships manager. Engagement with parents and carers and celebration of cultures is strong and strengthened by the academy's excellent knowledge of the local community and groups within it. This has led to improved engagement with parents and carers and local business links. For example, parents and carers come into the academy to contribute to projects and engage in extended learning facilities and enrichment classes.

The improvement in attendance and in students' behaviour, reduction in exclusions, and rise in students' attainment all reflect the academy's growing capacity for further and sustainable improvement.

External support

The School Improvement Partner is a regular visitor to the academy and provides thorough reports on its work. Links with primary schools are productive and lead by the sports specialism through the primary school coaching programme. Productive links have been established with two selective grammar schools to promote an aspirational and 'can do' culture and plan for sixth-form provision. Good links are established with the local authority across a number of areas including support for



the coordinator for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and training and behavioural management. Representatives from the sponsors are regular visitors, involved in governance and play a pivotal role in the academy's progress and development. In particular, their strong emphasis on community improvement has impact on the academy's ethos and vision. Staff place a high value on well-focused consultancy which has enhanced improvement and supports the aspirational culture. The academy has also drawn on the support of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the percentage of students gaining good grades at GCSE in English and mathematics.
- Accelerate the rate of progress by ensuring that more teaching is good or better, by:
 - sharing best practice in using assessment to support learning by ensuring that questioning is used effectively to challenge individual students according to their needs
 - ensure that marking in all subjects gives a clear indication to students of what they need to do to improve
 - ensure the effective use of data for lesson planning
 - review the academy's intervention and support strategies for students in lower set groups.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body
the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dcf.gov.uk]