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20 November 2014

Mrs Helen MacKenzie
Principal
Salford City Academy
Northfleet Road
Peel Green
Eccles
Manchester
M30 7PQ

Dear Mrs MacKenzie

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Salford City Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 19 November 2014 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 second 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.

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 second monitoring inspection on 19 November 2014

Evidence

During this inspection meetings were held with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair and members of the governing body, and representatives of the sponsor, United Learning. I also met with a group of Key Stage 3 students involved in work to improve student oracy and communication skills. Learning walks of the academy 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

Since my last monitoring inspection in June 2014 a new Principal has been appointed and took up post in August 2014. A new head of English has been appointed and took up post in August 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The new Principal has ensured that improvements made since the section 5 inspection have been embedded and further advanced. She has quickly gained the confidence of staff and students. A palpable feeling of an academy moving rapidly forward was apparent in speaking to senior leaders, teachers and students. Senior leaders have a strong understanding of their individual portfolios and their collective responsibilities to drive improvement and promote higher aspirations. Tracking and monitoring systems are well embedded and work. Students vulnerable to falling behind in work and progress are offered swift and well-focused intervention programmes. The use of progress boards has been extended and they are now used very well by subject leaders and their staff to understand individual student progress and how best they can support and accelerate student learning. The academy presents a well-ordered and purposeful working environment. This picture is supported by improved attendance and punctuality and was confirmed in discussions with students and teachers. Students are increasingly taking a pride in their academy and in their own work and endeavours within it.

There continues to be a strong emphasis on developing teaching and increasing teachers' awareness of the skills required to accelerate students' progress and enthusiasm for learning. Learning walks conducted during the monitoring inspection mirror academy documentation and data on improving trends in teaching and learning. In mathematics students worked well, with purpose and understanding. Students across a range of subjects were well engaged and made meaningful contributions to discussions and in response to teacher questioning. Behaviour was good. Professional development opportunities and the sharing of best practice are

well developed for staff. A very well focused development programme has been initiated to promote the ways and means for middle leaders to best understand their responsibilities, accountabilities and role as motivators within their areas of responsibility. Consequently, middle leaders are increasingly confident about their role in driving improvement. Performance management and accountability systems are strong.

Unvalidated data indicate significant improvement in examination results at Key Stage 4 in 2014. Academy data indicate a 13 percentage point improved pass rate for five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. There has also been a significant increase in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades at GCSE. The percentage of students who now make expected progress in English is at the national average and this accelerated significantly in 2014. While students made better progress in mathematics, academy leaders recognise that this requires further acceleration. Gaps in the performance of different cohorts of students have narrowed. Pupil premium funding (additional government money) is well targeted and is making an impact in promoting improved student performance. Senior leaders acknowledge that a further acceleration in GCSE performance is required in 2014/15. Academy data indicate that current Year 11 students are making better progress when compared to last year's cohort at the same stage.

Academy leaders have modified the post-inspection improvement plan so that key milestones have been established to ascertain the degree of ongoing improvement. Academy leaders have also moved swiftly to include students more creatively as participants in the development of an aspirational and improvement culture. For example, the academy student council has been reformed and empowered and its deliberations now include reviews of the quality of learning. A Key Stage 3 group of 27 students has been created and works closely with a group of Manchester University students on a programme designed to improve debating and speaking skills. Academy students reflected on how the programme was not only enhancing their debating skills but how it had also improved their confidence in class to engage in subject-related discussion and enquiry. This programme will be extended to further groups over time.

Members of the academy governing body have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. They hold senior leaders to account robustly and offer very good support and guidance. The governing body has a strong focus on improvement and high aspirations across all academy provision. They keep a watchful eye on the use and impact of the pupil premium and performance management as means to promote improved student performance.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Improved attainment and achievement in mathematics, English and science in GCSE results for 2014. More students are making expected progress and better than expected progress in English and mathematics.

- The short visits to lessons indicated that feedback is regular and detailed and includes students' responses to advice and reflections on improvements made. These visits also confirmed improvements in the extent and depth of students' speaking contributions in class.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students' progress is not consistently good across all subjects and departments. For example, in 2014, the GCSE results did not improve significantly in art and design, history, geography and several subjects within the design and technology area.
- Academy leaders acknowledge that further improvement is required in developing curriculum provision at Key Stage 3.

External support

The academy receives strong support from United Learning. Strong support is offered across the United Learning family of academies and from specialist staff in aspects of teaching and learning, teacher professional development and management improvement. There are good working relations with the local authority who have a senior member of their staff represented on the governing body.