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12 June 2015

Mrs Cath Green  
Headteacher  
University of Chester Academy Northwich  
Shipbrook Road  
Rudheath  
Northwich  
Cheshire  
CW9 7DT

Dear Mrs Green

**Special measures monitoring inspection of University of Chester Academy Northwich**

Following my visit with Alan Parkinson, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 10 and 11 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 academy'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 February 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. It is my recommendation that the next inspection of the academy be carried out under the provision of section 5 of the Education Act.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching across the academy so that it is at least good or better, in order to raise attainment and accelerate progress in all subjects, by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching
  - ensuring that all data about how well students are learning are accurate, and that teachers use it to plan lessons which challenge all learners to make at least good progress
  - setting ambitious targets for students, particularly the most able, in order to raise teachers' expectations of what they can achieve
  - ensuring that teachers assess students' work accurately, and improve the effectiveness of their marking and feedback so that all students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
  - ensuring that students' literacy skills are systematically developed across the curriculum
  - identifying bespoke training programmes for individual teachers to specifically help them improve their teaching skills.
  
- Improve behaviour so that students' attitudes to learning are always positive and enable them to make more rapid progress in lessons.
  
- Increase the effectiveness of both senior and middle leaders on improving teaching and achievement by:
  - ensuring that the systems which are in place to check on how well the academy is performing are robust, accurate, and used to identify clear priorities and actions
  - ensuring that leaders use the full range of available information, including students' progress and work in their books, when judging the quality of teaching
  - ensuring that all subject leaders and teachers are rigorously held to account for the progress of students
  - developing effective strategies for sharing the good and outstanding practice which exists within the academy.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 June 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, heads of department, groups of teachers and pupils, and representatives of the sponsor. Inspectors spoke with the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee by telephone. Both Key Stage 3 and 4 students were engaged in external and internal examinations during the monitoring inspection. Short visits to lessons were conducted with senior leaders. Inspectors watched behaviour around the academy.

### **Context**

The Interim Principal has now been made permanent Principal. The current seconded vice-Principal will take up post as the permanent vice-Principal in September 2015. A new head of mathematics has been appointed following the retirement of the current post holder and will take up post in September 2015.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The academy continues to build upon the good work undertaken over the last year in developing more robust systems for data collection and evaluation. The tracking and monitoring of student progress has been embedded within teacher and middle leadership practice. Current academy records and data indicate that students are making better progress in both English and mathematics. All groups of students, including disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs are making better progress. Gaps between different groups in attainment and achievement are closing rapidly. Assessment procedures have been strengthened with the introduction of cross-academy and external moderation and validation. Senior leaders acknowledge the importance of this year's GCSE examination results in confirming and solidifying academy improvement trends. Current academy projected estimates for GCSE performance in 2014/15 indicate a significant improvement in both attainment and progress indicators.

### **The quality of teaching**

A strong focus on continued professional development has enabled teachers to further refine and improve their teaching skills. Teachers in the academy are now better at and more confident in sharing ideas and their best practice. For example, excellent whole-year motivational 'impact' sessions were observed in English and mathematics by inspectors. In these sessions teachers had prepared high-quality collaborative materials and activities that challenged, fully engaged and advanced student understanding. Work scrutiny by inspectors identified strong marking practice. Students are clear about their targets and are making faster progress. Teachers now have consistently high expectations of students and this has helped to foster stronger challenge and enabled better progress for students. As a result, most students have embraced high aspirations and expectations and a genuine desire to do their very best at all times. There is a stronger focus on literacy across the

curriculum. Robust data on reading ages and attitudes are now available to better inform literacy strategies at Key Stage 3. Reading clubs are developing and the academy has planned a new library and learning support centre for the autumn term to increase the profile of reading and extended study.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Student behaviour in class and around the campus is good. Students are developing more positive attitudes to learning. They are embracing the ethos of high expectation in the academy and are participating more proactively in academy life through enhancement activities and cultural enrichment. Year 7 and 9 debating societies have been formed as a precursor to a stronger academy focus on developing oracy skills. A poetry society has been established. Student learning leaders with particular responsibilities are being established in each year group. Trips to Spain and France, conservation work, and cultural and sporting events are all enriching academy life. A new student leadership team in the current Year 10 has been selected through a rigorous and competitive process and this will enable students to embrace greater responsibility and challenge within the academy. The University of Chester Multi Academy Trust (UCAT) is instrumental in promoting links and opportunities for students to develop a wide range of interests and sow and nurture the seeds of greater expectations and ambitions for the future.

Attendance and punctuality are good. Students feel safe in the academy.

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

The appointment of the current post holders as permanent Principal and vice-Principal has strengthened the academy's capacity for further improvement. The senior leadership team now demonstrates a capacity to lead the academy forward rapidly and with confidence. Middle managers, staff and students expressed confidence in senior leadership and its impact on improving academy provision. The executive Principal of UCAN no longer has a role of regular oversight and this again reflects the growing capacity of senior and middle leadership at the academy. The Principal has further strengthened lines of accountability and responsibilities for all staff so that leaders at all levels have greater clarity, purpose and focus in conducting their duties. The Statement of Action Committee has continued its robust and supportive approach to holding senior leaders to account and has further extended this accountability to middle leaders. It continues to have a razor sharp focus on improvement. A new group, the Community Development Group, is shadowing the Statement of Action Committee through 2015 and 2016 to prepare for its transition to becoming the governing body of the academy. Among the members of this group are parents, a local college Principal and local business leaders.

Middle leaders are now fully responsible for the quality of teaching and learning and performance within their areas of responsibility. They form a strong strand of engaged and innovative middle leadership.

## **External support**

UCAT now provides excellent support for the academy. The academy trust and its partnerships enhance and contribute to the continuous professional development programmes for staff. The network also provides valuable assessment, moderation and validation opportunities and facilitates the sharing of best practice. UCAT has laid the foundation for capacity building at senior and middle leadership level. The key focus presently is on the ways and means to enrich the academy curriculum and how best to enhance a culture of high aspirations, opportunities and ambition for all. Links with the University of Chester are now beginning to impact in promoting this latter objective.