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Mrs Misia Barclay  
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Dear Mrs Barclay

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to University Academy Warrington**

Following my visit to your school on 7 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

Leaders should take further action to:

- tackle the areas for improvement outlined at the previous inspection that have not been adequately addressed
- rapidly improve the progress that pupils make by the end of key stage 4
- ensure that the assessment system is used effectively.

The trust should take further action to:

- enable the leadership team to make the strategic changes that will improve the school at the pace required.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, a representative from the statement of action committee (SOAC), the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), middle leaders and the librarian to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

As part of the inspection, I jointly undertook learning walks with members of the senior leadership team. I also scrutinised pupils' work during lessons, and a formal work scrutiny was conducted of a sample of Year 10 pupils' work. Also, I reviewed the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness, leaders' information about the progress and attainment of current pupils and past pupils, minutes from SOAC meetings, teaching and learning documents, and attendance and exclusion records. I also reviewed the school's records of the checks made to ensure that staff are fit to work with children.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection in November 2016, the number on roll at the school has continued to increase. Leaders have appointed three additional teaching staff to the school to cater for the increase in pupil numbers. The senior leadership team has been restructured and there is one fewer assistant principal. The CEO of the trust has changed. Leaders have taken action to replace some underperforming teachers.

During the inspection, I also checked the reasons why a significant number of pupils had left the school during 2016. Several of the pupils left to access alternative vocational education and a number of pupils moved to other schools in the area. These were as a direct result of parent and carer, and pupil, choice.

## **Main findings**

Leaders, including the CEO and the chair of the SOAC, are under no illusion that they have a very big task ahead of them until the school provides a good standard of education. The actions taken to improve the school since the previous inspection have been too fragmented and disjointed. Some key areas for improvement have not been sufficiently addressed. Added to this, until very recently, the trustees have not ensured that the principal has had the necessary autonomy to bring about the changes required to improve the quality of education that the school provides. Since October 2017, the CEO and the principal have begun to steer the school on a course of improvement. Nonetheless, these changes are too new to bring about the required improvements in order for the school to become good. They have not had time to have a sustainable impact on improving pupils' outcomes.

Following the inspection in 2016, outcomes at the end of key stage 4 declined considerably and in 2017, they fell below the government's floor standard. This is

the minimum standard that pupils are expected to achieve by the end of key stage 4. Leaders' own information shows that current Year 11 pupils are also set to underachieve markedly in relation to their starting points. In 2017, the school also met the government's definition of a 'coasting school'. These are schools that fall below the government's attainment and progress measures for three consecutive years.

In 2017, the overall progress made by pupils at the end of Year 11 was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. In English and mathematics, pupils' progress also declined greatly. The progress made by boys was very low, and almost all other groups, including the most able, underachieved in relation to their starting points. Conversely, in humanities, pupils made some of the strongest progress in the country. This demonstrates just what can be achieved with high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. Nevertheless, at the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils make good progress across the school in relation to their starting points. Although there are some signs of improvement in key stage 3 and in Year 10, this has not been achieved consistently across the school, particularly in Year 11.

Another key area for improvement identified at the last inspection related to improving the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at University Academy Warrington accounts for approximately half of the school's pupils. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils achieved over a grade lower than other pupils nationally. In many subjects, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils fell dramatically, especially in English and mathematics. The trust has not acted quickly to reverse this decline. The difference between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally has widened. Leaders were unable to provide evidence that this trend is likely to be reversed for the current Year 11 disadvantaged pupils. That said, leaders' own information about disadvantaged pupils' progress in other year groups, particularly in key stage 3, is beginning to show stronger signs of improvement.

In 2017, outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities were also far too low. These too had declined since the previous inspection. However, leaders have evaluated this provision and they are beginning to secure improvements to the learning and progress for this group of pupils. While the impact of the strategies to support these pupils is not embedded across the school, there are some successes in some subjects in Years 7 to 10. Added to this, leaders are monitoring more closely the progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Teachers have also received additional ongoing training to address some of the specific barriers to learning faced by these pupils.

Much of the issue relating to pupils' progress lies with weak literacy skills. At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to provide more books for pupils to read for pleasure, both in school and at home. While leaders have opened their new library,

the principal has only just been able to introduce additional strategies to develop pupils' literacy. For example, teachers are beginning to use a wider range of information relating to pupils' reading ages to inform their planning. Pupils who enter the school below age-related expectations are just about to receive additional phonics sessions. This trust-wide tardy approach to improving the quality of education is hampering pupils' learning and progress.

The slow pace with which leaders have tackled improvements relates to issues within the trust and its leadership of the school. There have been too many initiatives that have impeded the improvements required to move the school on apace. For example, the principal, the CEO and the chair of the SOAC recognised that the imposed curriculum did not meet pupils' needs. Although changes to the curriculum have since been made, some qualifications still do not meet pupils' needs.

Leaders, the CEO and the chair of the SOAC also acknowledge that the school's assessment systems must be used more effectively to improve learning and progress, especially to enable the SOAC to hold leaders to account. This group receives a wealth of information, but it is unwieldy. In addition, the assessment system does not allow leaders to track accurately the progress of pupils working below age-related expectations with sufficient rigour or clarity. The CEO acknowledges that the status quo can no longer continue. Although there have been steps to improve this at school level, these fundamental aspects of leadership and management still need to be addressed at a quicker pace.

Leaders, including the CEO and chair of the SOAC, know what needs to be done in order to improve the school. They have an appropriate, overarching whole-school improvement plan in place, with quantifiable measures of impact. It is fit for purpose. However, the principal and her team now need the trustees' authority to implement it to enable the school to become good.

Although the overall school improvement plan is appropriate, the same cannot be said for the improvement plan relating to disadvantaged pupils. It requires significant development to have the desired effect on improving outcomes for this group of pupils. The barriers to learning faced by these pupils are not explored in sufficient depth. Consequently, not all staff use this information to provide high-quality teaching and learning to meet these pupils' needs. Added to this, leaders have not evaluated the impact of the additional funding to support learning and progress with sufficient precision. Many of the key actions from the previous year simply roll over to the next year.

Leaders do recognise that there remain significant concerns. They also accept the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning further. They recognise that this is what will make the biggest difference to pupils' achievement. While key improvements have been made to ensure that middle leaders are accountable for the quality of teaching in their subject areas, not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. Pupils are not consistently

challenged to make good progress. Leaders recognise that teachers need to plan more effectively for the different abilities within their classes so that learning and progress continue to improve. Nevertheless, leaders have effectively improved teachers' questioning techniques and they have recently overhauled schemes of work, particularly at key stage 3, to increase the level of challenge. Once again, it is too early to measure the effectiveness of these changes on pupils' learning and progress.

The pupils with whom I spoke were also very clear that they want more challenge in their learning. For example, in key stage 3, some pupils are repeating work that they have done in primary school. Pupils did, however, tell me about the positive relationships that their teachers have with them. They are clear that their teachers are committed and want to enable them to excel. Pupils also acknowledge that behaviour is very good across the school. The principal has worked effectively with staff to address incidents of poor behaviour. Most pupils are now ready to learn.

Another area where the principal has secured significant improvements is to pupils' rates of attendance. Since the previous inspection, there had been a substantial decline in pupils' attendance. This year, leaders have taken effective action to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and they have reduced the proportion of pupils that is persistently absent from school. In 2017, almost a quarter of pupils were regularly absent from school. This figure has improved remarkably. In addition, leaders have successfully reduced the proportion of pupils who are temporarily excluded from school. This year, only very small numbers of pupils have been temporarily excluded. This demonstrates significant progress in this area.

### **External support**

Although the school is receiving ongoing support from the trust, it is not having the desired effect in addressing the key areas of improvement from the previous inspection with sufficient alacrity. However, the appointment of a new CEO has afforded the school access to the subject networks provided by the University of Chester. Specialist leaders of education continue to work with middle leaders across the school.

In addition to the support brokered through the trust, the principal works with a leadership coach and has support from a national leader of education. The principal has also brokered external support from a teaching school alliance to assist in improving the quality of teaching in a range of subjects. One assistant principal is about to begin a national leadership programme. Nonetheless, although a wide range of support has been put in place, it has not yet had the desired impact of stemming the decline in outcomes for pupils by the end of key stage 4, especially for disadvantaged pupils. The school should consider how it could better broker external support to improve the quality of learning and progress for disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the SOAC, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the chair of the board of directors of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warrington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**