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02 May 2015

Mr N Jamieson  
Principal  
The Cheadle Academy  
Station Road  
Cheadle  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST10 1LH

Dear Mr Jamieson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Cheadle Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- Complete the external review of pupil premium that was recommended in the section 5 report immediately.
- Sharpen improvement planning so that actions are linked to measurable success criteria and milestones so that leaders can clearly gauge the impact of new initiatives on students' achievement and other outcomes.
- Ensure that robust strategies are in place to arrest widening gaps in English between boys and girls and between disadvantaged students and their peers.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I spoke by telephone to a consultant who is currently supporting academy improvement. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. I undertook brief visits to a number of lessons accompanied by academy leaders and looked at examples of students' work. A range of the academy's documents and records were also examined.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, two teachers and two members of support staff have left the academy.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection, the Principal, leaders and governors have worked with determination to transform a culture of low expectations that made students' underachievement acceptable in the past. This has required a wide-ranging overhaul of systems.

Targets for students' achievement are now based on national expectations of students' progress, as opposed to attainment, which had previously masked poor performance. Improved systems for tracking students' progress based on regular teacher assessments ensure that teachers and leaders can identify any students who are falling behind and act to halt this. This has led to clearer and more robust systems of accountability. Regular meetings between subject leaders and line managers prioritise the monitoring of students' progress. This accountability is further reflected in teachers' performance management targets. However, leaders need to seek greater assurances that the assessment information offered is accurate through external moderation, particularly as some of this information has been overgenerous in the past.

Checks on the quality of teaching are now held without notice. As a result, leaders have a clearer and more realistic understanding of the typical standards of teaching across the academy. These checks are also used to offer feedback to teachers so that teachers can improve their practice. Subject leaders make more rigorous checks of teaching and students' work within their teams. Plans are in place to further quality assure these procedures to ensure that consistently high standards in all lessons are the norm. Training has already taken place to improve teaching so that it better meets the needs of the most able students and I saw how teachers' planning now recognises the need for greater challenge for this group of students. An extensive programme of further professional development is now planned and will take place this term.

Leaders recognise those improving students' attitudes to learning and aspirations will make a vital contribution to raising standards. A programme entitled 'You Can Do It' has been devised to support the development of positive learning behaviours throughout the academy. Although some pilot activities have taken place, this programme has yet to be fully embedded. Strengthened procedures for reducing the proportion of students who do not attend the academy regularly are having an impact, and the gap with other schools nationally is now closing quickly. Further work has been undertaken to remodel the curriculum so that the choice of subjects and amount of time allocated promotes better engagement and achievement over time.

During my short tour of the academy, I saw how teachers now have detailed information about their students to inform their lesson planning. In the Year 11 mathematics lessons I visited, students were set work that enabled them to work on areas of weakness identified in their weekly tests. As a result they were able to close the gaps in their learning. In the majority of lessons, students were attentive, engaged well with activities set, and worked purposefully both independently and with their peers. Some students, particularly those in the Year 11 lessons I visited were extremely well motivated and eager to do well. These positive attitudes supported students' learning. Many students were able to articulate clearly what they needed to do to improve their learning.

At times however, the pace of learning is still too slow, so that some students are not making the progress that they are capable of. In some cases, although teachers have access to comprehensive information about students, it is not always evident how they are using this to make adjustments to their planning to meet the different needs of learners. The introduction of a new electronic system to set homework for students has been well received. This also enables leaders to better monitor the quality of homework set. Indicators of early impact show that homework is now set with greater regularity.

Governors are very aware of the failings of past leadership and of the shortcomings in their own skills that allowed this to happen. They have undertaken a range of training including in understanding published data so that they have an accurate view of how well the academy is performing in relation to other schools nationally and are better able to challenge leaders. They have also sought more effective deployment of those staff on the upper pay scales, so that these staff are more accountable for having an impact on academy outcomes and for bringing about improvements. Further changes are scheduled to take place to restructure the governing body so that all governors have a better understanding of the work and performance of the academy. An external review of the governing body is currently underway. When this is completed, a copy needs sending to me and an action plan produced.

The academy's records show that some aspects of achievement are expected to improve this academic year. For example, the proportion of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades is expected to rise. Likewise, the overall progress that students make in English is expected to be broadly inline with that of other schools nationally. However, gaps between boys and girls and between disadvantaged students and their peers look set to widen in this subject. This is a concern. Although these gaps are closing lower down the school, the legacy of past underachievement has meant that even with a wide range of interventions, some key student groups are still expected to underachieve. An external review of pupil premium has not yet been undertaken. Given the weaknesses in the achievement of these students, this needs to be completed with immediate effect and the outcomes of this review addressed in the academy improvement plan. Rates of progress in mathematics are still too low for the current Year 11 and again, reflect underachievement over time.

Leaders have produced an action plan that directly tackles the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. The timescales for implementing actions reflect a sense of urgency but are not always precise enough. Some targets in the plan do not state the impact that leaders' actions will have on students' achievement clearly enough. Some success criteria need to be refined so that they are measurable, and milestones offered in order that leaders can be sure that they are on track to be successful in their actions and be held to account for this by governors.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The academy has commissioned a consultant to work with leaders. This person has a thorough and accurate understanding of the strengths of the academy and what areas need to be developed. Work undertaken includes working alongside leaders to quality assure judgements made about the quality of teaching and delivering training to governors so that they understand published information about the academy's performance. As a result, leaders and governors are now very clear on the academy's weaknesses and what needs to be done to secure improvements. Plans are in place to forge links with other schools in order to support the work of subject leaders, but these need to be accelerated in order that capacity to secure improvements is built rapidly.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

- cc. Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- cc. Local authority
- cc. The academy chain where relevant
- cc. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form [hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk)
- cc. [[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)]