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27 October 2017

Mrs Jenny Langley  
New Charter Academy  
Broadoak Road  
Ashton-under-Lyne  
Lancashire  
OL6 8RF

Dear Mrs Langley

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of New Charter Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 10–11 October 2017, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). I recommend that any such NQTs are recruited in an appropriate number and that they are provided with opportunities to access high-quality professional development through the trust.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen O'Neill  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017.**

- Rapidly improve pupils' progress in core subjects, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, by:
  - using information about pupils' abilities to plan suitable learning
  - making learning engaging
  - using questioning to better challenge the most able pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and in turn reduce incidents of poor behaviour and reduce truancy by:
  - using information about pupils' abilities to plan suitable learning
  - ensuring that behaviour is managed fairly, consistently and proportionately
  - establishing a positive, supportive and rewarding climate for learning.
- Improve behaviour, safety and the personal development and welfare of pupils by:
  - ensuring that all staff receive child protection training
  - increasing the numbers of staff on duty at social times and the end of the school day
  - reducing racist, homophobic and other derogatory language around the school
  - ensuring that internal and external exclusions lead to improvements in behaviour.
- Improve the 16 to 19 study programmes by:
  - ensuring that almost all pupils who start Year 12 complete Year 13
  - improving the quality of teaching to improve progress
  - evaluating rigorously the current quality of provision
  - creating a coherent plan for improvement.
- Immediately improve the quality of leadership by:
  - strengthening the process of self-evaluation
  - rigorously evaluating the impact of new initiatives, including by taking into account the views of pupils, parents and teachers
  - holding leaders at all levels accountable for the standards that pupils achieve.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 10 October 2017 to 11 October 2017**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, members of the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, teachers and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust. The inspector also spoke by telephone to the chair of the executive board.

The inspector carried out joint learning walks with the trust teaching and learning consultants and observed pupils during lessons and social times. The inspector reviewed the safeguarding policies and practices and checked the single central record.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, the trust has appointed a new principal and has created an interim executive board to work with leaders to secure rapid improvements across all areas of the school. A number of teachers and support staff left the school at the end of the summer term and leaders have appointed new teachers across several subject areas. There remain two vacancies that are due to be filled shortly. Leadership roles were redesigned and in September a new assistant principal was appointed to lead the area of attendance and punctuality.

As a consequence of the last inspection, the principal and the trust took the decision to close the sixth form. Leaders managed the closure sensitively, interviewing students and their families to make sure that each student secured a place on a suitable alternative course.

The trust has appointed four teaching and learning consultants. Two consultants work primarily at the school and the two other consultants work between New Charter Academy and the trust's other schools. These consultants work closely with leaders and staff to improve rapidly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The judgement of special measures came as a disappointment, but not a surprise, for staff and leaders. The inspection in February came during a turbulent year for the school community. Teachers and leaders recognised that standards were falling and that pupils' needs were not being met. As a result, outcomes were low and behaviour was deteriorating. It is commendable to see the new positive mindset of staff, who now focus on ensuring that pupils get the best experience possible during their time in the school.

Since your appointment at Easter, you have provided much-needed direction and purpose. Staff and the vast majority of pupils are fully supportive of you. They are embracing change as they are seeing positive improvements in the short time you have led the school. As a result of strong leadership and improved communication, staff morale is rising. Staff are vocal in their support of you and your leaders. They show their willingness to commit to the school through the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and additional lessons that they provide for pupils. Staff are once more working as a cohesive team with a 'family spirit'.

The comprehensive action plan underpins the recent improvements. It sets out a clear path for future developments. The addition of quantifiable measures of impact will add extra clarity for you and your leadership team to judge just how successful your actions have been. The trust's statement of action is detailed and is a working document. It highlights the areas still in need of improvement and those where successful actions have already been taken.

The interim executive board meets monthly to monitor the progress of the school against its action plan. The board holds leaders at all levels firmly to account and is committed to making sure that the quality of education improves rapidly and in a sustainable way. The chief executive of the trust has been invaluable in providing the right balance of support and challenge for you and your leadership team. The trust, under the clear and strategic direction of the chief executive officer, focuses sharply on developing and securing leadership across the school. The school has realistic plans to support becoming a good school and leaders are committed to ensuring that no more pupils are failed.

You, with the support of the trust and its consultants, have been unrelenting in your drive to improve teaching, learning and the behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school. You have a firm belief that high-quality teaching will promote good outcomes for pupils, along with good behaviour and good attendance. As a result, the climate for learning is improving in many lessons and both staff and pupils say that attitudes to learning are much better.

Since your appointment, you have re-established accountability at all levels, from the trust and senior leaders to classroom teachers. New appraisal procedures are supporting high-quality teaching and learning and staff now benefit from a supportive approach to professional development. Staff are now more comfortable observing other teachers' lessons and they are open to observations themselves. You make sure that the pockets of good practice in the school are shared more effectively. Staff are proactive in seeking out their own professional development and they deliver training sessions in areas where they are strong practitioners. This is a testament to the confidence teachers now have in their teaching. It is also a clear sign of the supportive environment that you and leaders have now created.

Both you and the trust have established many new management systems and procedures. You have also streamlined many school systems. Consequently people

work much more effectively in new team structures. For example, new behaviour and attendance procedures are beginning to show positive improvements. Safeguarding has been prioritised and an audit undertaken and acted upon. Comprehensive child protection training for all staff has been undertaken. The number of staff on duty and their effectiveness has improved. As a result, the safety of pupils on site has also improved.

You and the trust have also overseen a total rebranding of the school to Great Academy Ashton. You have introduced a new uniform, a new website and a new vision. Pupils speak very highly of these changes, acknowledging that this is a 'fresh start' for themselves and for the position of the school within the local community.

Parents now engage with the school in more positive ways since the last inspection. While a very small minority of pupils and parents are not yet on board with the new direction of the school, the overwhelming majority are supportive of the latest changes.

Overall, the new initiatives that staff are implementing are showing early signs of impact. However, these initiatives are taking time to embed across the school. The school has moved on considerably since the inspection in February 2017. However, there is still much work to be done. You, leaders and staff are under no illusion that this journey will be neither quick nor easy, but all are determined that it will be successful.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The work done by all staff, from classroom teachers to consultants, has made marked improvements to the climate for learning seen in the vast majority of lessons. The 'strong start' to lessons ensures that pupils engage in learning right from the beginning of the lesson and it sets a positive tone for the rest of the lesson. There is evidence of stronger teaching across some areas of the school. However, the quality overall is still varied. Some teaching still fails to promote good progress for pupils.

Learning is stronger when subject knowledge is good, relationships are positive and questioning challenges pupils' thinking. Nevertheless, this is not consistent across subject areas and year groups. Some teachers do not build effectively upon prior learning to inform their planning.

You and your leadership team have high expectations of both staff and pupils. Staff and pupils know this and the vast majority rise to the challenge admirably. While teachers are managing behaviour in lessons more effectively, pupils told the inspector that disruptions to learning still occur and therefore progress is still hampered. Leaders and teachers are swift to address issues as they arise, but long-term habits of poor attitudes to learning are taking time to change. Learning in pupils' books shows varied progress.

Teachers are beginning to use assessment information with greater effect to plan their lessons. When precise planning meets the needs of pupils, progress is more rapid. Some teachers have high expectations of what pupils should achieve and they set tasks that challenge pupils to work hard. Occasionally, however, this is not the case and planning does not cater for the differing needs of pupils, especially the most able. This leads to tasks being too easy and pupils do not make fast enough progress. Some teachers do not confidently assess how well pupils are learning during a lesson. Consequently, pupils' learning is still slow because misconceptions go unaddressed.

That said, leaders have well-thought-out, appropriate plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders at all levels are aware that improving teaching and learning is the golden thread that runs throughout the school and that considerable work remains to be done in this area. Leaders, however, do not yet make secure judgements about improvements to teaching and learning that link to work scrutiny, pupil voice and the rates of progress made by pupils. The teaching and learning team has identified this as their next step.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

There are significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons. Strong introductions to lessons focus pupils on learning and improve their attitudes to work. Clear and effective systems are in place to manage poor behaviour and limit disruptions to pupils' learning. Pupils say that although some of their learning is still interrupted by incidences of poor behaviour, these are much less common and are dealt with well by staff.

Pupils are smart in their new uniform and show a pride in their school. They are polite to visitors and generally show respect to staff and other pupils. Behaviour during social times is still boisterous and noisy. Leaders have taken note of recommendations from the previous report and ensure that adequate staff are now on duty during social times. Staff on duty make sure that pupils are safe and behave appropriately. However, some pupils do not manage their own behaviour so that social times and lesson changeovers are orderly and purposeful.

The school's behaviour logs show that fixed-term exclusions are falling but remain high for disadvantaged pupils. Internal exclusions have fallen considerably and pupils and staff report that the effectiveness of this sanction has improved overall behaviour. Pupils no longer wish to miss lessons and this can be seen by the drastic fall in pupils truanting from lessons. Pupils and staff told the inspector that only a small number of pupils now try to truant from lessons, as tighter systems mean that pupils will be quickly identified and appropriate action taken.

New systems to improve attendance and punctuality are evident in improving attendance rates for most pupils. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils

and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is still too low. These pupils are also more likely to be regularly absent from school.

New leadership of attendance has improved both rewards and sanctions for pupils. Leaders use weekly competitions between forms and year groups to motivate pupils to attend more regularly. Pupils are keen to win points for their form and positive messages sent home to parents also help to celebrate the gains that pupils have made. Despite these actions, the attendance of some older pupils remains stubbornly low. Year 7 pupils, however, have got off to a flying start in high school. Leaders are determined to build upon these strengths and continue to focus on areas where attendance and punctuality remain lower.

Pupils say that bullying is rare and that when it does occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils feel that less bullying occurs now as they are learning to be more accepting of individual differences. Pupils generally feel safe around school and they say that there is an adult that they can talk to if they have any concerns. Year managers and form tutors provide valuable support for pupils. While racist language is rare, derogatory language including homophobic comments are more commonplace. You and your leadership team are aware that this issue is a high priority for improvement.

Student leadership is growing in strength. Pupils now feel that they have a voice and that they are heard by staff. The student council regularly meets and is led confidently by the head girl and head boy. Pupils are proud of the work they do to educate other pupils about the dangers of social media through the 'safe social network activity practice' group. Pupils are also developing as peer mediators and speak positively about the training they have received to enable them to support younger pupils.

Pupils are open and honest in their evaluation of the school. Pupils describe the school as being 'a change in progress' and attribute the positive developments to leaders who have 'improved the school a lot'. They believe that all members of the community have taken significant strides but that they are still on a journey towards being 'one family'.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

National changes to examinations in 2017 mean that comparisons to previous years cannot be made directly. However, the school's analysis of provisional results for 2017 suggest improvements in attainment for most pupils and for groups of pupils. The provisional outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4 in 2017 show a greater percentage of pupils now achieving a good pass in mathematics and English.

Progress is improving slowly year on year. However, it is still below the national average for all pupils. Disadvantaged pupils make slower progress than their peers

and the most able pupils are not making as rapid progress as others in the school or nationally.

Information provided by the school shows that current pupils make reasonable progress but the rate of improvement is not fast enough to help pupils to overcome the legacy of previously weaker teaching. Leaders are aware that although the picture is improving, it is not improving quickly enough. Some differences in attainment and progress for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are beginning to close, but, again, not rapidly enough.

Leaders identify the effect of poor attendance on the progress of pupils. Some pupils and parents do not fully appreciate that pupils will achieve much more if they attend regularly. Pupils attending alternative provision have historically not made good progress. Despite regular contact from leaders, pupils have underachieved. As a result, you are reducing the number of pupils who work with alternative providers so that you can better ensure their attendance, progress and behaviour.

Leaders at all levels recognise that previous outcomes were poor and that procedures to monitor progress did not identify the scale of underachievement quickly enough. As a result, immediate action has been taken to rethink the school's approach to assessment and analysis of data. New systems are embedding and will be analysed for impact during the next monitoring visit.

The leadership of assessment provides clear direction for middle leaders. Leaders are much more rigorous in ensuring that teachers' assessments are more accurate and reliable. This means that leaders and staff have a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each pupil, as do parents and pupils themselves.

### **External support**

All of the support for the school is being provided by the Great Academies Education Trust (GAET). There is support for developing leadership, including that of the new principal. Added to this, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving as a result of the work of the consultants provided by the trust to work almost exclusively in the school. Consultants have undertaken a range of reviews, for example about bullying, attendance, safeguarding and admissions procedures.

Some support is now being provided from the areas where good practice exists within the school.