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21 February 2013

David Brown
Executive Principal
The Oxford Academy
Sandy Lane West
Littlemore
Oxford
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Dear Mr Brown

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Oxford Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 February 2013, 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 28 November 2012.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Executive Principal, Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and two other representatives of the sponsors. The sponsors' statement of action and the academy's action plan are the same document. This was evaluated during the visit.

Context

The senior education consultant who was working at the academy at the time of the last inspection has been appointed as interim Executive Principal, because the previous Principal has left. There is also a new Vice-Chair of the Governing Body appointed from the Diocese of Oxford.

Six members of teaching staff have left the academy. Four teachers and a special needs coordinator have joined the staff. A further six teaching appointments are planned.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The governing body has accepted that they could have acted sooner to tackle the academy's underperformance. It has, however, now taken decisive action to appoint the external consultant brought in just before the last inspection as interim Executive Principal. There is a sense of direction and urgency. Roles and responsibilities and the contribution of the sponsors have been clarified. Protocols for meetings are now clear and a committee structure is in place, including one group of governors to monitor progress against the statement of action. Governors are meeting very regularly with the academy's senior leadership team. The sponsors have been helpful in providing some extra funding to support provision of a wide range of external consultants to coach and develop staff skills in critical areas such as curriculum expertise and quality of teaching.

The new interim Executive Principal has a clear view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. His initial focus has been on generating capacity within the leadership team, who are now working collaboratively together with a clear sense of purpose. They recognise the need to find a balance between ensuring the best possible outcomes for the current Year 11 at GCSE in 2013 and starting to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the academy. This has already generated confidence within the staff. In addition, he has started to extend and develop links with parents and the local community.

The statement of action is tightly and appropriately focused on the key areas for development identified at the last inspection plus other additional critical issues, such as the need for an urgent curriculum review and improving attendance. A wide range of effective actions have already been taken; for example, providing personalised professional development for teachers, starting to develop teachers' knowledge of syllabuses and examination requirements, clarifying lines of accountability and reorganising and strengthening the governing body. However, the plan has been written by a range of different people and, so far, there has been no external guidance and help in writing it. As a result, there is no consistent format for each section, roles and responsibilities of key staff are not clearly identified, and robust systems for monitoring and evaluation are only present for some actions. Regular quantitative milestones would allow senior leaders, staff and governors to measure small steps in progress and quickly correct slippage.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers to the English and mathematics departments provided the academy's sponsor assists in providing support. I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers to other departments.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the DfE - Academies Advisers Unit. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector