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21 March 2013

Mr James Freeston  
Head of School  
King Offa Primary Academy  
Down Road  
Bexhill-on-Sea  
TN39 4HS

Dear Mr Freeston

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of King Offa Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 19–20 March with Christine Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

### **Evidence**

We observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, the Chief Executive of the Aurora Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Academy Board, senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, and representatives from Mosaica, the company which set up the academy trust.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

### **Context**

The academy caters for pupils from 4–11 years of age. At the time of this inspection, there were 284 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional funding based on the number of pupils in local authority care, from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with statements of special educational needs is in line with that found

nationally, as is that supported by school action. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion whose first language is other than English is around half the national figure.

King Offa Primary Academy serves many pupils whose parents and grandparents attended the predecessor school.

### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

The academy is building with determination on the work done by the predecessor school to increase pupils' progress and raise standards. Across the academy, pupils' attainment overall is low and their progress less than expected for their age. The percentage of Year 2 pupils currently on course to meet nationally expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the summer term is low. The performance of pupils eligible for the pupil premium and pupils who speak English as an additional language is no better, but not worse than this. Overall, girls are doing better than boys.

Pupils' progress looks more encouraging for the current Year 6. A greater proportion of these pupils are expected to meet nationally expected standards in reading, writing and arithmetic by the time they leave the academy. Although overall standards are still low, and particularly so in writing for boys and for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, Year 6 have, nonetheless, made good progress since September 2012.

Pleasingly, children who joined the academy's Reception class in September are doing well, particularly in the development of their communication and language skills.

Across the academy, during lessons where teachers focused with clarity on delivering the lesson objective, we saw a brighter picture. Pupils made good progress because they were enthused by crisp teaching, interesting activities and good support for their learning needs. In a Year 6 class, for example, pupils made strong progress because the teacher used her well-founded subject knowledge confidently to match questions expertly to pupils' differing abilities and thus make learning about division fast and interesting.

Standards of handwriting are high in all classrooms and are rightly a source of much pride to pupils.

Although there is a plan as to how pupil premium funding will be spent, the academy does not have a overarching strategy to ensure that interventions for every pupil eligible for the pupil premium raise their parents' interest in their schooling and boost these pupils' achievement.

## **The quality of teaching**

Some good teaching was seen during this inspection which moved pupils' learning quickly forward. Such teaching at the academy is typically characterised by clearly understood routines so that pupils organise themselves quickly and without fuss. These teachers are particularly adept at involving pupils throughout the lesson. They achieve this by, for example, using a range of questions – whole-class, targeted and quick-fire – to ensure that children listen, build on each other's answers and clarify their thinking, or by asking pupils to discuss questions or issues briefly with each other before selecting some to contribute to wider debate. These good lessons are well planned and focused very sharply on what teachers want pupils to have mastered by the end of the lesson. The role of extra adults in the classroom is carefully considered to ensure that this valuable extra resource is well used to support pupils' learning.

The teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) is generally a strength and pupils are for the most part drawing on their bank of knowledge about letters and sounds when they write. Teachers do not always ensure that children are sat comfortably at a desk as they learn to write letters in exercise books. This militates against a good pencil grip and comfortable writing.

Some teachers provide a good model of clear speech. They use, consistently and deliberately, complex sentences and higher-level vocabulary and rightly expect pupils to do the same. A striking example of stretching children's vocabulary and so raising achievement was seen in Reception when a teacher encouraged children to discuss their recent visit to the post office.

Some teaching is not as strong. Here, teachers miss opportunities to keep pupils engaged in learning and debate. Explanations lack sharpness. Pupils have to listen for long periods and lose focus because the teacher involves too few of them in answering questions, in discussion or debate. Some teachers have not established good routines with their classes, so movement around the class lacks purpose and is noisy and wastes time. During some lessons, teachers did not scan their classes to make sure children were interested and listening, and thus to choose the right moment to intervene or change tack or activity. At times, additional adults are not briefed well enough so are not actively making a real difference to pupils' learning.

Interventions for individuals and groups in the Reception class are well planned and executed. Teachers have given good consideration to developing solid links with parents and have been successful with most. Gaps remain across the academy, however, and parents of several pupils eligible for the pupil premium have not been targeted to develop their understanding of how they can and should support their child's learning at home. Interventions higher up the academy have not, traditionally, been measured in terms of the good they do for pupils. The academy has just begun to assess pupils' abilities when they begin an intervention, with the intention of checking the value added to each pupil's skills and knowledge. This

process is timely as pupils sometimes have a high number of interventions and nobody is sure which, if any, intervention is making a difference for them.

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

Pupils feel very safe and well looked after. They behave calmly around the building. In classrooms, when teaching is good, pupils show a zest for learning. The pupils with whom one of us met said that sometimes lessons are disrupted by irritating behaviour on the part of other pupils. They noted that 'when the teacher puts them on a black cloud for behaviour, it doesn't work'. We did not see episodes of this kind during the inspection.

The new curriculum is helping pupils to enjoy learning. One girl said, 'It makes learning fun', adding, 'I didn't know where Mesopotamia was! Now I'm an expert.'

Attendance is improving and, at this point in the year, meets the national average. Support to improve the attendance of persistent absentees is focused on supporting their families by, for example, providing breakfast at the academy. Such initiatives are effective in securing incremental change for the better in these pupils' attendance.

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

In the three months since you joined, you have made a busy, purposeful and effective start on gauging teachers' performance and, where necessary, improving this. You have observed lessons in every classroom and provided clear written feedback for each colleague. Your evaluation of teaching is not simply confined to observing lessons, however. You examine pupils' work in depth and also consider how much progress pupils are making in their learning over time before coming to judgement. This approach takes a fair, rounded and accurate view of teachers' abilities.

Procedures to manage teachers' performance are rightly rooted in the need to increase pupils' academic achievement and measurable targets are set for teachers to improve the pace at which pupils make progress. Middle leaders are relatively new to their roles. They know that the academy must continue to improve provision for pupils but are at an early stage of playing their part in academy-wide leadership.

The new curriculum has provided a welcome new focus for pupils and many of their parents. While it is undoubtedly a worthwhile innovation which is giving a clear shape to the progression of pupils' skills beyond English and mathematics, it is clear that teachers are not sufficiently confident in adapting teaching materials to the needs of their pupils. Moreover, the curriculum currently lacks a distinctively local element.

The small Local Academy Board is led by a Chair who is experienced and knowledgeable. Her visits to the academy are a key plank within monitoring

procedures and her valuable notes of visit provide clear direction for further improvement.

### **External support**

You are effectively challenged and supported by the Chief Executive of the Aurora Academy Trust, who has a good knowledge of the academy and the challenges it faces. The academy also benefits from support and professional guidance from colleagues in other academies in this chain. This guidance has been effective, for example, in helping staff to check accurately the standards that pupils are reaching.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Raise achievement by:
  - developing a strategy which accurately targets pupils eligible for the pupil premium, pushes their achievement and develops the involvement of their parents
  - measuring, regularly and accurately, the impact of intervention strategies so that these are more closely matched to the needs of individuals
  - ensuring that teachers use high-level speech and complex vocabulary and insist that pupils do likewise.
- Improve teaching so that it is generally good by ensuring that teachers:
  - focus their explanations clearly on what they want pupils to learn
  - develop a wider range of questioning techniques to challenge and motivate pupils and keep them involved and on track
  - develop crisp organisational routines for learning which enable pupils to make the best use of time
  - ensure teaching assistants are fully briefed and play a full part in the lesson
  - scan the class to check pupils are alert and involved in learning and to shape the lesson accordingly.
- Contextualise the new curriculum by ensuring that teachers adapt it to their classes and overlaying it with a relevant local flavour.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Local Academy Board, the Chief Executive of the Aurora Academy Trust and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**