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David Brown
The Oxford Academy
Sandy Lane West
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Dear Mr Brown

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Oxford Academy

Following my visit with Louise Lee and Derek Wiles, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 8–9 May 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Governing Body and as below.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- In order to improve students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics, eradicate inadequate teaching and raise the proportion of good or better teaching in all subjects by:
 - making sure that teachers make better use of information about what students already know so that work is accurately tailored for students of all abilities, particularly the most able
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of work that all students can be expected to achieve
 - extending the range of strategies teachers use to increase students' active involvement in lessons
 - sharing the good practice which exists within the academy more widely
 - ensuring that teaching in all subjects, wherever appropriate, contributes to developing students' basic skills in reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and numeracy.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of all leaders, managers and governors by:
 - taking students' progress and attainment into account when evaluating the quality of teaching of individuals and the performance of departments
 - evaluating the impact of all new initiatives on students' achievement, and adjusting the initiatives' implementation as necessary
 - evaluating how effectively the current systems for tracking students' attainment and progress and provide suitable information to inform students, teachers and leaders of students' progress
 - improving the programmes of study in the sixth form so that they better meet the needs and aspirations of all students and encourage them to continue their learning
 - making sure that the governing body uses accurate information, gathered from more rigorous evaluation, to help it monitor the school's effectiveness better and hold leaders and managers to account for students' achievement
 - developing clear procedures for meetings of senior leaders, the governing body and the sponsors and ensure that they result in a coherent approach to improving the school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8–9 May 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim Executive Principal, senior and middle leaders and groups of students. A meeting was held with five governors, including representatives of the sponsors. This meeting also involved the Chair of the Governing Body via a telephone link. A telephone call was made to the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

A business studies teacher and the finance director have both left the academy and been replaced. Two history teachers and one mathematics teacher started at the academy at the start of this term. Five appointments for mathematics, science and English have been made to cover current vacancies. These teachers will start work at the academy in July. Three non-teaching staff have left and three appointed, although only one to the same role.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academy has focused strongly on improving achievement for students in Year 11. Many of these students have a long legacy of underachievement. In order to maximise their attainment in GCSE examinations this summer, teachers are using information from assessment to identify those who are underachieving and are providing extra support and help, particularly in English and mathematics. GCSE results in 2013 are likely to be considerably better than in 2012, but may still be below the government's floor standard. Students are also making faster progress in some, but not all, subjects in Year 11.

In other year groups, students are not making enough progress. Year 10 students are doing slightly better than those in years 7, 8 and 9. Information about progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is not available for younger year groups. The very high proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals perform less well than their peers, but the gap is not wide. All students need to make faster progress, particularly those who are disabled or who have special educational needs.

Many students arrive at the academy with attainment well below the national average in both English and mathematics. The curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is designed to tackle this, but the school does not yet know how effective it has been in improving reading, writing and numeracy skills. For example, the academy does not know how much difference the extensive reading support for some students in Year 7 has made.

The quality of teaching

Students are not making fast enough progress because not enough teaching is good. There is some excellent practice in the school but this is not sufficiently widespread. In the best lessons, teachers plan to make sure that they provide sequential activities that will ensure that every student makes progress. Students are interested and the pace of the lesson is brisk. However, too many lessons are still taught by unqualified or supply teachers, who do not know the students well enough. Senior staff are overestimating the quality of teaching and are not linking their judgements tightly enough to the rate at which students make progress over time. Teachers' expectations about the amount of work that students can complete in the 100-minute lessons are too low and the pace of learning is slow. Lessons will be shorter from July 2013.

Relationships between teachers and students in lessons are good. Students are positive about school and are keen to learn. In many lessons, they demonstrate this by asking questions and showing curiosity. Those in Year 11 are very focused on their work and grateful for the extra support they are getting from teachers. Teachers are very aware of how well students are progressing in Years 10 and 11, but in other year groups they do not consistently use assessment information to help them make sure that individual students are given the right work in lessons to help them improve. This is particularly the case for those who are more able and those with special educational needs. Sometimes work is not challenging enough. The quality of marking is variable, with not all subjects having a clear and consistently applied policy.

Poor reading and writing skills limit the progress that some students can make. All teachers have received training in how to help students read and write better, but a focus on developing literacy is not seen consistently in lessons other than English.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The atmosphere in the academy is calm. Students say that behaviour has improved substantially since the academy was put into special measures. Exclusions have reduced by two thirds and there is far less internal exclusion. During this visit, poor behaviour was only seen in the few lessons where the teaching was inadequate. Students are attending much more regularly. The academy has worked extensively with individual students and families, and is using funding creatively to improve attendance. Absence rates have fallen quickly, although overall attendance rates remain low in comparison with the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Morale amongst the academy staff is good. The interim Executive Principal has managed to create a cooperative, warm and trusting atmosphere where teachers are

gaining confidence and are ambitious to improve. Senior leaders are given responsibility and autonomy but, because the senior leadership team is so large, there is sometimes an overlap in roles. A new senior leadership structure is being developed for the next academic year, and some new and effective senior staff have been appointed. The quality of middle leadership is improving, although there is still considerable variability in their skills. This group of leaders now have regular meetings, more responsibility and are increasingly accountable to the senior team for achievement within their subjects.

Considerable changes to the curriculum, both in the main school and in the sixth form, are planned for the start of the next academic year, including a change to 60-minute lessons. These changes should help to ensure that the curriculum meets students' needs more effectively and will help to set up a secure infrastructure for the future. There is, for example, a proposal for a pilot scheme to cooperate with two other local secondary schools to provide a wider range of courses in the sixth form.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of how well students are achieving and are aware of a link with the quality of teaching. The systems to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve achievement and teaching are not thorough or timely enough to clarify what is working and what is not. A clear cycle of monitoring and evaluation is needed in order to hold leaders sharply accountable and to decide exactly what needs to be done next to make the most difference. There is rightly an unrelenting focus on the achievement of Year 11 students in English and mathematics at GCSE in 2013. This is absolutely necessary in order to ensure the best possible future opportunities for these students. However, leaders need to create a much better balance between improving the outcomes for these students and ensuring urgent long-term sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching in all subjects for students in all year groups. Planning to improve the quality of teaching is not sharp enough, and does not have sufficient focus on improving teaching to good. When individual teachers and middle leaders have received personalised support and coaching, especially from external consultants and providers, teaching has improved, but this is not widespread. In addition, there has been no evaluation of how much difference whole-school training has made in classrooms to the quality of teaching and, thus, students' progress. Even though there have been considerable improvements in English and mathematics, overall the pace of improvement in teaching across all subjects is too slow.

The governing body and the committee that monitors progress against the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, lack a sense of urgency. These groups have not met often enough to accelerate change, although there is now agreement that the frequency of meetings needs to increase. For example, there was agreement, after the inspection that put the academy into special measures, that there should be a review of governance but this has still not taken place. Plans for the appointment of a substantive Principal are just starting.

Governors have asked the academy's leaders to provide more comprehensive data about students' achievement. Accurate information has been provided but is too complex and not sufficiently well analysed and evaluative for all governors to understand without extensive explanation from senior leaders. Challenging questions are asked of the academy leaders, but these are mostly linked to achievement with insufficient focus on the quality of teaching.

Governors are meeting with senior leaders more regularly and asking them to attend governing body meetings so that they can ask questions and get a clearer understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. Regular visits to the academy mean that governors are better informed, but findings are not consistently reported back to the whole governing body.

The governing body is not meeting its statutory responsibilities with regard to regular updating and review of statutory policies. The academy's single central record is complete and up-to-date.

External support

The academy is receiving extensive external support from a range of organisations and external consultants. Challenge Partners have supported English, geography, design and technology, and business studies. Most of this work with departments has concentrated on improving the quality of teaching, validation of marking and, in some cases, developing leadership skills. This has been particularly successful in English and geography.

Oxford City Learning and Challenge Partners have both been involved in providing effective support for members of the senior leadership team who were new to their posts.

An external consultant through the Department of Education has provided extensive support for Year 10 and 11 students, and for improving the quality of teaching in mathematics. The success of this is evident in the likely improvement in mathematics GCSE results in 2013. Other consultants have supported history and teachers who have been in the profession for between two and five years. Teachers from two local secondary schools have provided guidance for drama and art.