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David Brown
Principal
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 Michael Hiscox and Robin Sidaway, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 11–12 September 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers in any key stage.

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 Sponsors' Executive Group.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- 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 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.

Special measures: monitoring of The Oxford Academy

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11–12 September 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and members of the senior team, middle managers, staff and students. The lead inspector also met the Chair, Vice-Chair and another member of the Sponsors' Executive Group and an external consultant who is supporting the school. Inspectors carried out 25 lesson observations and all but one of these was done jointly with members of the academy's senior leadership team.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the governing body has been replaced by a temporary Sponsors' Executive Group, with four members who represent the sponsors. The appointment of a new permanent Principal is underway for January or April 2014. Roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team have been reorganised, and Heads of Year and Heads of House have been given additional responsibilities. Three teachers left at the end of the last academic year and 11 have been appointed. Eight started work at the academy in July and the rest in September. The length of lessons has reduced from 100 minutes to one hour.

Achievement of pupils at the school

A substantial improvement in Year 11 students' achievement in English and mathematics in 2013 raised standards at GCSE to just above the minimum expected by the government. This is a great deal better than in 2012 and was the result of personalised support for underachieving students throughout the previous academic year. The proportion of students who made expected progress also rose but does not yet meet the national average. However, the effort expended on improving standards in English and mathematics meant that many other subjects did not show significant improvement. For many students the other three grades that contributed to them achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics came from work-related courses rather than more traditional GCSEs. Adjustments have been made to the curriculum for students taking GCSEs in 2014 and 2015 in order to avoid this in future. In the sixth form, results also improved for Year 13, but too many students in Year 12 did not achieve well enough. The academy is aware that some of these students were on unsuitable courses, and has taken extensive steps to ensure better advice and guidance for the current Year 12.

Students in other year groups are making faster progress in English and mathematics, except in Year 7 where progress in English is much too slow. Although reading skills show an improvement, students' writing is not good enough. A new system for checking progress in other subjects in Years 7 and 8 was introduced at the start of this academic year but at the time of this visit there was insufficient information available to make a judgement about students' progress. The academy has improved its collection of information about all students' progress and will report to parents six times during the coming academic year.

White British boys, more able students, those who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who are disabled or have special educational needs are not making enough progress, either at GCSE or in other year groups. Those students who have a statement of special educational needs and therefore receive extensive support both within and outside lessons do much better than those whose needs are met by classroom teachers.

The quality of teaching

A more structured and personalised programme of training for teachers, higher expectations of middle leaders and some new appointments are all contributing to improvements in teaching. This is particularly evident in English and mathematics, where there is a corresponding acceleration in the rate at which many students make progress. In other subjects, the impact on students' progress is still more limited. However, teachers are ambitious to improve and are increasingly receiving the support they need, both from sharing the excellent practice already in the academy and from external consultants.

The atmosphere in classrooms is generally warm and positive, with students keen to learn. The most confident teachers use this enthusiasm to provide stimulating and exciting lessons, but for others unnecessary anxiety about behaviour makes them more cautious. When assessment information is used effectively to plan activities and teachers model what high-quality work will look like, students make faster progress. Although not yet consistent across all subjects, students are increasingly given regular and thorough feedback through marking with guidance about how to improve their work. In many lessons they are also given time to make corrections and act on suggestions.

The slower rate of progress for different groups of students is linked to the quality of teaching. Although expectations of what students can achieve are rising, the most able students do not make enough progress in lessons because they are frequently given work that is not hard enough. Too often, if extra work is provided they are simply expected to work faster and complete more. In lessons where the teacher ensures that individual needs are met, all students make suitable progress. However, in too many lessons teachers do not use the guidance provided for students who have special educational needs to make sure that activities are challenging but

understandable for every student. These students are not given short-term targets that they are then supported to meet. The impact of the work done by teaching assistants is not routinely monitored and evaluated, nor is there a performance management system in place for these staff. Middle leaders do not routinely analyse and evaluate the reasons for the underachievement of students who are eligible for the pupil premium.

Poor writing skills are still holding back some students. Since the last monitoring visit, teachers have received training in developing literacy and the impact of specific strategies to improve reading and writing for students in Year 7 is now more closely evaluated. It is clear from displays in classrooms that there has been an emphasis on increasing vocabulary and many students can express themselves well verbally. However, teachers of all subjects and year groups need to be much more rigorous and insistent in their demands for high-quality writing from students. Errors of spelling and punctuation are not routinely corrected. Poor handwriting is tolerated, and some younger students do not use joined-up writing and mix upper- and lower-case letters.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Improving behaviour has been a high priority for the academy. The positive results of this effort are evident from the way students conduct themselves both in and out of lessons, and from their respectful and warm relationships with staff. They wear their uniform with pride and are very pleased about the increasingly positive profile of the academy in the local community. Almost three times as many students enrolled into Year 12 this year as in 2012, indicating that students have confidence in the academy. Senior leaders have revisited the academy's behaviour and anti-bullying policies and developed them further with contributions from both staff and students. Serious incidents of poor behaviour are increasingly rare and very few lessons are disrupted. Exclusions have reduced, and students say they feel very safe in school. Any bullying is followed up rigorously.

Students enjoy being at the academy and as a result attendance is rising quickly, although it is still below the national average. The number of persistent absentees has fallen as a result of some creative use of funding, but senior staff are very aware that the numbers are still too high.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The members of the new Sponsors' Executive Group have, in a very short time, provided considerable expertise and clearer, more decisive direction for the academy. They and the academy's leaders have a realistic view of the amount of work that needs to be done but there is new sense of confidence, openness and urgency. They have recognised that the key to raising achievement is to improve teaching, and this is their main priority. The GCSE English and mathematics

improvements in 2013 have also encouraged teachers and students to be more ambitious. Middle leaders have more autonomy and are increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching. Staff training is more personalised and support from outside consultants more focused. There is more emphasis on the need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of actions taken to find out what works and what does not.

The academy's leaders are aware that low attendance, poor literacy skills and an unsuitable curriculum have affected achievement negatively in the past, particularly for boys, students who are disabled or who have special educational needs, and those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. However, although attendance is rising, lesson observations by senior leaders do not always focus enough on how much progress these groups of students are making, or on how teachers are developing students' writing skills.

A thorough review of the curriculum has taken place and many changes to courses have already been implemented at the start of this academic year. More consultation is taking place to plan further changes for 2014/15. In addition to providing a curriculum that meets students' needs more effectively, these changes are intended to ensure that the academy is fully meeting the statutory requirements for religious and sex and relationships education.

The academy's single central record is up to date and the Sponsors' Executive Group is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities with regard to safeguarding.

External support

Support from Challenge Partners and other external consultants has been more tightly focused since the last monitoring inspection. Teachers are unanimous in their praise for the help they are receiving. Support has been provided for teaching in specific subjects, particularly English, and guidance given to help the adjustment to 60-minute lessons. Training from a range of sources has been provided for governors, middle leaders and a group of teachers who have been in the profession for three or four years. The curriculum review which has provided the framework for developments over the next five years was carried out by an external consultant in collaboration with senior leaders.