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31 March 2014

Niall McWilliams  
The Oxford Academy  
Sandy Lane West  
Littlemore  
Oxford  
OX4 6JZ

Dear Mr McWilliams

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Oxford Academy**

Following my visit with Gwendoline Onyon and Martin Spoor, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 28 and 29 March, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 28 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

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, the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire and the Chair of the Sponsors' Executive Group, which represents both sponsors and governors.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey  
**Additional 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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 28–29 March 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, three groups of pupils and the Chair and two other members of the Sponsors' Executive Group, which acts as an Interim Executive Board.

### **Context**

The new principal had been in post for four weeks at the time of this visit. There have been no other changes to staffing since the last monitoring visit.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The academy is on track for achievement for Year 11 in 2014 to match 2013. As a result of changes to the curriculum, a higher proportion of grades A\* to C are expected from GCSE courses rather than from vocational equivalents. Nevertheless, although attainment is likely to be above the minimum standard required by the government, the proportion of students making expected progress will remain too low. External support to help improve English has had a very positive impact and as a result more students are making expected progress in English than in mathematics, where similar support has not been provided. In addition, staffing in English has been comparatively stable whereas in mathematics there have been many changes and too many non-specialists teaching. Current assessment information for Year 11 shows that a higher proportion of boys are likely to underachieve than girls. Students who are eligible for the pupil premium are not making as much progress as other students, and the gap between these students and others is widening. This is a high priority for the new principal. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs in Year 11 are achieving better than in 2013.

The academy is now collecting data about students' achievement more regularly for other year groups. As in Year 11, progress in English is better than in mathematics. There is insufficient data to know whether or not students in Year 7 have made progress since they started at the academy in September. This shortcoming needs to be tackled quickly. A very high proportion of these students arrive at the academy with a reading age below their chronological age and literacy issues are not being tackled urgently or comprehensively enough. There are too few links between the extra support provided for reading and writing, lesson planning, provision for special educational needs and the management of behaviour. In addition there is too little follow through for students after Year 7.

Achievement in the sixth form was inadequate in 2013. Current assessment data show some improvements as a result of better teaching, but there is still much ground to make up. The academy's leaders recognise that a major cause of underachievement and high drop-out rate in 2013 was the poor quality information, advice and guidance for Year 11, who then attempted unsuitable courses. The sponsors have agreed to fund a full-time member staff to ensure that this is better for the next academic year, and that careers advice starts much earlier in the academy.

### **The quality of teaching**

At the time of the last monitoring visit teachers were having to spend a great deal of time providing additional support for underachieving students as they approached GCSE examinations. This is still the case and is putting a major burden on teachers, particularly in English and mathematics. There is less of an impact on other subjects this year but this extra help is still not always organised efficiently. Students in other year groups, including the sixth form, feel that in some cases this affects the commitment teachers have to them and the quality of teaching and marking that they receive.

Improving the quality of teaching for all students has become a higher priority, with teachers ambitious to improve. There is clear evidence that professional development and individual coaching are helping and there are examples of some inspiring outstanding and good teaching, but this is not yet sufficiently widespread. In many lessons, not enough is expected of students; the work provided is not hard enough and students do not complete enough of it. In these lessons teachers are not ambitious enough, and as a result students do not make enough progress. Too often students are not aware of what a high quality piece of work will look like, and so are not clear what to aim for. There is still too little focus on handwriting, presentation and encouraging students to take a pride in their work. Students say that work is marked regularly in English and mathematics, but not reliably in other subjects especially in Years 7, 8 and 9. In some cases they are expected to respond and there is a useful dialogue with the teacher about how to improve which helps them make progress. In subjects other than English, the correction of literacy through marking remains very variable.

Special needs provision is much better than at the time of the last visit. Disabled students and those with special educational needs have been involved in creating concise guidance for teachers about their individual needs and what helps them to learn. These strategies are easily accessible for staff and in many lessons are used effectively. However, systems for middle leaders to monitor that they are being implemented in classrooms are not robust enough. In some lessons, the language used and the reading levels expected are too demanding and students are occupied rather than learning. Teachers do not always consider whether marking comments are legible or understandable for the lowest ability students.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The new principal has quickly started to tackle some deterioration in students' behaviour since the last monitoring visit. Systems for managing behaviour are currently not tight enough or consistently applied. There is an emphasis on rapid intervention and parental contact when students misbehave. Students and staff say that this is already making a difference and have confidence in the principal's approach. Students describe feeling safe and say that bullying is handled effectively.

In lessons, girls settle more quickly and are more focused on their learning than boys, who often take some time to get started, and as a result make less progress. There is frequently an undercurrent of chatter, sometimes related to the work, but this slows the work rate and students' output. This is especially the case when activities are not sufficiently stimulating and varied, or when tasks are unstructured and rely on students' own motivation.

The academy is using a very wide range of strategies to improve attendance, but overall improvement is slow. Analysis of the attendance data could be more probing; for example the academy is not aware which groups of students are responding to the strategies it is using.

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

The new principal has made a measurable, positive difference in his first few weeks in post. Senior and middle leaders are unanimous in appreciating his very clear student-centred vision and a willingness to engage with their views, and those of students. He is actively seeking the support and opinions of parents. He is already making clear that his priority is to engender much higher aspirations and encourage coaching in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The improved leadership for teaching and learning and for special educational needs is already making a difference and there is appetite amongst the staff to improve their teaching. Currently however, the emphasis on intervention in English and mathematics for Year 11, although necessary, is having a negative effect on the rest of the academy's work.

Restructuring of the leadership team is planned because it is currently too large. It is not efficient and does not provide good value for money. Roles and responsibilities are not clear to either senior and middle leaders or other staff, and there is some overlap. The quality of middle management and the level of support provided for subjects other than English and mathematics remain variable. Middle leaders are increasingly held to account for progress in other subjects, but this is only for Years 10 and 11.

Although the academy's system for tracking students' achievement provides useful information, it is too complex, cumbersome and time-consuming with too little emphasis given to finding out what has worked, and then planning and clarifying the next steps. The academy is not working with ambitious enough targets. There is a good quality data analysis system in place but it is not used effectively to provide easily understood and visually simple information, not only for staff and students, but also for governors. New arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are already planned.

The Sponsors' Executive Group have tackled the urgent need for improvement with energy, expertise and commitment, meeting fortnightly to review progress. These members also form the Academy Interim Board who since appointing the new principal, have listened to his views and are providing a high level of support to help streamline the staffing structure and simplify systems. Sponsors have agreed to provide funding for key new appointments to develop stronger links with the community and improve the capacity of the academy to provide high quality information, advice and guidance for students in all year groups. Plans are in place to replace the Academy Interim Board with a larger, permanent governing body.

The single central record meets government requirements.

### **External support**

Challenge Partners continue to work very effectively with the English department, and Year 11 progress in English is improving.