

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01216 799164
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com



3 July 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 Susan Tabberer and Frank Knowles, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 1–2 July 2014, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was fifth monitoring inspection since the school 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 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 Chair of the Sponsors' Executive Group and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

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 work 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 1-2 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other members of the senior team, teachers, a group of pupils and the Chair and the other members of the Sponsors' Executive Group.

Context

The academy's leadership team has been restructured, reducing from 14 members to seven. A new permanent vice-principal post with responsibility for teaching and learning has been created. At the end of this term 12 members of staff will be leaving the academy. There are 24 new teachers appointed for the autumn term, some of whom have already started work at the academy. The increased numbers will provide experienced lead practitioners and a specialist support team to extend staffing in English and mathematics. One vacancy remains for an additional member of staff in special educational needs. Three of these new appointments are shared with Cherwell School. New heads of English and mathematics have been appointed from within the academy staff. The head of science is on a temporary contract.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The Year 11 students sitting their GCSE examinations in 2014 had very low attainment on entry to the academy. The academy's own assessment indicates that they have made much better progress from their starting points than students in previous years, and are expected to achieve GCSE results similar to those seen in 2013. In English, the proportion of students making expected progress is close to that typically seen nationally. Progress is not so strong in mathematics, where there have been too many staff changes and there has not been enough consistently good teaching. About two thirds of this year group are boys and they do not achieve as well as the girls, especially in English. Too many students are likely to achieve Grade A* to C in either English or mathematics at GCSE but not both.

The academy now has much more detailed and comprehensive information about students' progress in other year groups. Assessment data are collected and analysed very regularly, so leaders are increasingly aware of the precise areas where there is underachievement. Students in Years 9 and 10 are also making better progress. However, in Year 8, and to a lesser degree in Year 7, low literacy levels are still holding many students back in English and other subjects where there is a significant written component. Recent analysis has confirmed that lower ability, disabled students and those who have special educational needs make more progress than students of higher or middle ability. As a result of better quality information, advice and guidance in the sixth form, retention of students has

improved because they are on the right courses, and students' achievement, both at A and AS level, is also much better than in 2013.

The quality of teaching

Much of the improvement in the performance of Year 11 students is the result of the provision of additional classes to make up for a legacy of poor teaching and rapid staff turnover in previous years. However, the improved rates of progress in other year groups indicate that the quality of teaching is improving. The best teachers are making very effective use of the assessment information they have been given about students to plan lessons that ensure every student is given appropriately challenging work. They model exactly what students need to do to achieve well and question and probe students' answers in lessons effectively to develop their thinking and ascertain their understanding. As a result the rate of progress accelerates.

However, many teachers still lack confidence in their ability to manage students' behaviour. This means they sometimes give students too little opportunity to practise and reinforce new skills. This slows the rate at which students make progress. Teachers do not adapt their teaching sufficiently to ensure that students can make progress. Lack of skill in using assessment data to inform planning means that some teachers are not sufficiently aspirational or ambitious for students and demand too little of them. More-able students especially, are frequently under-occupied or given work that is too easy, so do not achieve as much as they could.

Systems for supporting disabled students and those who have special educational needs are now much more secure, and improvements here are reflected in the academy's data about students' progress. However, teachers are not given enough guidance on the best way to help these students effectively in the classroom. There are too few teaching assistants for the high numbers of students who need support and those that are available are not always efficiently deployed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students describe an enormous improvement in behaviour in recent months and are full of praise for the new Principal who 'cares about all of us'. They say the rules are clearer and that he has 'settled the school down' and 'makes everyone feel welcome'. Teachers are applying the rules more fairly and consistently. The number of exclusions has fallen in recent months. Around the academy students are polite, well-mannered and respond quickly to correction from staff. The atmosphere is calm and cooperative. There is not yet a consistently applied reward system in place, but the views of students are canvassed regularly and this is under development for next term.

In lessons students are ready and willing to learn. When teaching is stimulating and interesting they are keen and respond with great enthusiasm. However, when

teaching is weaker, there is occasionally off task chatter and a failure of a few students to engage fully. Students are ready to be given more responsibility for managing their own learning.

The academy takes a robust approach towards poor attendance with a relatively high number of prosecutions instigated this year to tackle some resistant cases of persistent absence. This has had limited success. The academy also takes its role in safeguarding very seriously, refusing to remove leavers from the school roll until their next school is confirmed and this frequently take some months. Both of these issues affect the overall attendance figures. However, the underlying trend is of improvement and this year's figure is close to that typically found nationally. Attendance in Year 11 has improved steadily over the year as the students have approached GCSE, indicating that the academy is effectively providing both motivation and support.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new Principal, now in post for one and half terms, has an absolutely clear and realistic view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. He has gained the trust of staff, who understand and support his vision. Most of all they appreciate his 'hands-on' approach and his total commitment to the students, their families and the local community. Self-evaluation is accurate and the current short-term improvement plan is well focused on what needs to be done quickly. Much of the Principal's time has been spent on ensuring a secure staffing and systems for the new academic year. Staff say the roles and responsibilities of the smaller, restructured leadership team are already clearer, and although this reorganisation has been a difficult process, confidence in his decision making remains high. He has found creative ways of ensuring full staffing for September by working with another successful local secondary school to arrange some shared appointments to increase staffing levels in mathematics and English. He is also working on much more ambitious targets through a new academy improvement plan. External advice about the best way to tackle the very low literacy skills of students on entry to the academy has been used to develop a whole academy plan for implementation in September.

Middle leaders' skills are becoming more effective. They appreciate the greater trust, autonomy, responsibility and support invested in them by the Principal. The capacity to support and develop teachers' skills is developing strongly, especially those appointed more recently. Communication systems are more secure but middle leaders and other staff still lack enough time to plan effectively. To help this, the number of meetings has been reduced and those that are held are more focused.

The new vice-principal responsible for teaching and learning now has this as her only responsibility, and she is now able to focus fully on this area. Much work has been done with individual staff this year but more robust and comprehensive plans for professional development for teachers linked to the teachers' standards,

performance management and a close analysis of individuals' needs are in place for the next academic year. A new coaching model has been drawn up, using the good and outstanding practice already in the school.

Analysis of the impact of pupil premium spending shows that the gap in performance between the high number of these students who are eligible for this funding and others is narrowing in all year groups except Year 8, where achievement overall remains low.

The sponsor's executive group has been very supportive throughout this time of change but its members are not afraid to challenge when it is appropriate. They meet very regularly to hold the senior leaders to account and are working towards expanding the representation from parents and the local community. The information they are provided with about students' achievement is now more useful, but still not sufficiently succinct.

External support

Challenge Partners has provided continuing support for English and mathematics, which has contributed to the improvements in achievement in these areas. This organisation has also provided guidance on the best ways to improve literacy and numeracy, which has led to the whole school strategy for the next academic year. The alliance with Cherwell School has made possible some joint appointments, improved recruitment and provided induction and support for new heads of department. One member of the Sponsors' Executive Group, provided by the Department of Education, is a very experienced headteacher from a London school. She is providing invaluable support and guidance for the Principal, which has contributed to the rapid change in ethos in the academy.