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Mr Niall McWilliams  
Principal  
The Oxford Academy  
Sandy Lane West  
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OX4 6JZ

Dear Mr McWilliams

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Oxford Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 2 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to ensure that:

- there are clear plans to improve teaching for the most-able students
- data available are used to best effect to monitor the impact of teaching over time and to measure the impact of improvement plans.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the sponsors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I walked around the academy with one of the vice-principals to see classes at work, evaluated the academy's action plans and looked at other key documents.

## **Context**

The restructuring of the senior leadership team has been completed since the inspection. In addition to you, there are two vice-principals and three assistant principals. One of the assistant principals will be taking maternity leave very shortly.

## **Main findings**

There has been no let-up in the pace of change seen at the inspection. Appropriate actions have already been taken to address the key priorities because, in the main, they were already scheduled as part of your three-year improvement plan. No-one is under any illusion about what still has to be achieved, but there is a positive approach to tackling it.

The post-inspection action plan sets out specifically what the academy will do by the end of this school year to improve teaching, achievement and leadership and management. Importantly, it also includes the actions that will be taken to continue to improve students' attendance and attitudes to learning. Targets for 2015 in the improvement plan are appropriate milestones. When targets for 2016 are agreed, they will need to be more ambitious if the academy is to be judged good at its next full inspection. More detailed action plans, for example for improving literacy, underpin the over-arching plans. Typically, the proposed activities are appropriate and follow on logically from one to the next. It is clear who is taking the lead, although not obvious who will be responsible for checking on progress and impact. Start and finish dates are not always specific, meaning that there is potential for slippage or overload points. Some costs are missing.

What is not explicit is how the academy intends to improve communication with parents in the short term. It is clear, however, that plans to increase parents' involvement will be put in place shortly. You are waiting for the findings of the recent research with parents in the area conducted with the city council. Attendance at recent meetings for parents has been much higher than in the past.

It was evident from my walk around the academy, and discussion with the vice-principal, that as senior leaders you know where teaching is stronger and where it still needs to improve. Whole-staff training to establish a consistent approach to teaching and learning, combined with tailored support for some departments and individual teachers, has had a positive impact on classroom practice. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Students' attitudes to learning remain positive. Actions to develop the teaching of mathematics and literacy further and meet the specific needs of different groups of students have started, as has ongoing coaching for all staff. There is not, however, sufficient focus on ensuring that teaching meets the needs of the most-able students.

Information about students' attainment and progress is collected at regular checkpoints during the year. Data for current Year 11 students indicate that standards and progress will be higher than 2014 figures and above current floor standards. Senior leaders increasingly hold heads of department to account for analysing data to identify issues, the intervention required and its subsequent impact. It is not, however, entirely clear since the senior leadership restructuring and with other staff changes where the operational responsibility for inputting data and the strategic overview lie. Monitoring of teaching does not yet make full use of data to check the impact teaching has on learning over time.

Senior leaders, sponsors and governors have worked together to resolve the significant budget deficit. You are awaiting final agreement from the Department of Education. The impact of financial decisions must be monitored carefully by all parties to ensure they are not detrimental to the academy's continued progress.

The transition from sponsors' executive group to governing body is more or less complete. The increase in the number of governors has let the governing body set up key committees to take responsibility for finance, curriculum and standards and pupil welfare. The committees are all due to meet for the first time soon. The intention is that this will allow the whole governing body to be more strategic and focus on evaluating the impact of improvement plans. To do this it is essential that the intended impact is clear and measurable. Currently, this is not always the case.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The support provided by an experienced headteacher and national leader in education has been invaluable in improving governance and providing support for you. Helpfully, she will continue to work with the academy until the end of this school year. The diocese is providing a significant number of days support from its secondary adviser. You ensure the support needed for specific subjects or aspects of the academy's work by drawing on the local teaching school and through links with other schools. You are also using external consultants.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

**Alison Bradley**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**