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17 January 2011

Mr Michael Wilkins  
Chief Executive and Academy Principal  
Outwood Grange Academy  
Potovens Lane  
Outwood  
Wakefield  
West Yorkshire  
WF1 2PF

Dear Mr Wilkins

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Outwood Grange Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Heather Barnett HMI to your academy on 13 to 14 January 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Chief Executive and Academy Principal, Principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust and the Chair of the local Governing Body.

### **Context**

This academy provides education for 2200 students aged 11 to 18. It opened as an Academy of Excellence in September 2009. The predecessor college was judged outstanding when inspected by Ofsted in 2006 and, thereafter, standards continued to be very high. It is a National Leader in Education Support School and a designated specialist school for technology, arts, leadership development and

training. The academy is sponsored by the Outwood Grange Academies Trust and is a founder member of the Outwood Grange Family of Schools. The academy provides support to five other schools in this group, all of which joined at a time when they were in an Ofsted category of concern or experiencing significant difficulties.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. A well-below average percentage are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low compared with that found nationally.

### **Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

Nationally validated data, academy records and students' work show that, since the academy opened, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have continued to rise from their previous very high levels. Underpinning this are recent marked improvements in students' progress in English and mathematics resulting from more effective subject leadership, teaching and support for underachievers. The achievement of all groups of students continues to improve because senior leaders frequently check that their work enables them to accelerate their progress. The achievement of students with significant special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving rapidly because their lessons combine stimulating, enjoyable learning activities with a high degree of challenge.

Standards are improving in the academy's specialist subjects, technology and arts. Students in the sixth form are rapidly improving their progress and standards in all subjects. The proportion of students progressing from the first to the second year of the sixth form has risen significantly, as has the success rate of those applying to university. With the support of the academy, standards in all five schools within the Outwood Grange Family are improving strongly.

Because of new approaches to teaching and curriculum organisation, students are highly motivated to learn. In lessons, there is an increasingly positive climate for learning with all students extending their understanding through independent and collaborative work.

### **Other relevant student outcomes**

Improving attendance has been a key priority for the academy and this is rising quickly. This is largely because each student's attendance is monitored carefully and immediate action is taken when there is any decline. Students' behaviour has continued to improve significantly since the academy opened and it now makes a very strong contribution to their learning and progress. The overwhelming majority

of students take a very responsible approach to managing their own conduct in classrooms and public areas; therefore, they need very light adult supervision.

A strong focus on healthy living in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities gives students an improving understanding of the detrimental effects of smoking, alcohol and drugs. The curriculum also effectively increases students' understanding of how to live harmoniously in a diverse society and how to prepare for work and family life after leaving school. Students say they feel very secure in the new academy because they are clear about the range of adults to whom they can turn with any concerns.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Strongly rising standards are the outcome of combined improvements in teaching, assessment, support and guidance for students, and the curriculum. The curriculum provides increased opportunities for each student to choose a course that matches their aspirations and interests because a wide range of academic, vocational and personal enrichment options are shared across Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The mixing of age ranges within courses enhances students' collaborative learning. These arrangements have greatly increased the options available to sixth form students and, therefore, constitute a highly effective response to the one area for improvement identified in the last inspection of the predecessor college. The Year 7 curriculum includes courses in developing learning skills and these have an immediate and sustained positive impact on competences, such as learning collaboratively and independently planning work. Central to the effectiveness of the curriculum is the provision of extended lessons which enable students to learn in depth and complete tasks thoroughly.

Extended lessons are effective because teachers have successfully adapted their methods in order to maintain students' engagement in learning over a longer period. For example, there is increasing consistency in the way that teachers make provision for a range of students' learning styles, including interesting problem-solving and research tasks. Lessons are punctuated with highly effective opportunities for students to assess their own or their partners' progress against clear success criteria, and they use these opportunities to improve their work. Students' motivation is increased because their work in many subjects is linked to interesting, topical issues. Teachers are skilful in asking questions that challenge all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to explain, analyse and evaluate. This extends their understanding considerably.

Supporting the increasingly effective teaching is a very systematic approach to using assessment information to set suitably challenging targets and to plan work that helps students to meet these targets. The assessment information is updated frequently so that students whose progress is stalling are quickly identified and they receive well-planned support which helps them to get back on track.

An important factor contributing to the growing effectiveness of the curriculum is the high quality of guidance available to students when choosing their courses, followed by careful monitoring of their progress so that any necessary adjustments are made without delay. Underachieving students rapidly accelerate their progress because they receive one-to-one support and mentoring from senior leaders who have a detailed understanding of their academic and personal needs. Students with significant special educational needs and/or disabilities improve their achievement because the planning of their teaching and support is informed by a very detailed assessment of their strengths and barriers to learning.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The overall effectiveness of the academy is improving rapidly because of the exceptional ambition, drive and guidance provided by the Chief Executive and senior leadership team. They have successfully established a culture of high expectations for raising standards and a very clear, shared understanding of the approaches to teaching, assessment, curriculum organisation and leadership that will enable these expectations to be met. These approaches are implemented with increasing consistency and effectiveness because there is a systematic approach to the professional development of all staff, much of which is carefully tailored to individual needs.

Through a rigorous schedule of monitoring and evaluation, academy leaders have a detailed and accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision and students' outcomes. They ensure that decisive, effective action is taken when any weaknesses are detected.

A key strength of the academy is its excellent approach to building leaders' capacity to continue improving provision and raising standards. Potential leaders are identified at an early stage and given effective training combined with the opportunity to broaden their experience in other schools within the Outwood Grange Family. This helps them to develop their skills quickly and put them into practice without necessarily having to seek employment elsewhere.

The Outwood Grange Academies Trust works effectively in partnership with the local governing body and the Chief Executive to monitor the performance of the academy and to ensure that any required improvements are implemented in a timely fashion. The Trust has ambitious but realistic plans for the growth of the Outwood Grange Family of Schools and Outwood Grange Academy's role within it.

## **External support**

The academy does not receive any formal external support. However, academy leaders, members of the governing body and teachers benefit considerably from the opportunity to work in the other schools within the Outwood Grange Family. For example, the governing body and new leaders extend their skills in a range of different contexts, while many staff members learn from new approaches to teaching and the curriculum being developed in partner schools.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Rutherford  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**