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9 December 2011

Sir Iain Hall  
Oasis Academy Oldham  
Butterworth Lane  
Chadderton  
Oldham  
OL9 8EA

Dear Sir Iain Hall

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Oasis Academy Oldham**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Jane Jones HMI to your academy on 7 and 8 December 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

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

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, staff, groups of students, members of the Academy Council, and the Director of Education for Oasis Community Learning, representing the sponsors.

### **Context**

The academy opened in September 2010. It is sponsored by an educational trust, Oasis Community Learning. The academy is currently on the sites of the two predecessor schools. It is due to move to a new building on a new site in September 2012 and will serve a changed catchment area. The academy has specialisms in mathematics and computing with business and enterprise. The members of staff appointed were almost all from the two predecessor schools. In July 2011, the Principal left and an Interim Principal and Associate Principal took up post. A new Principal has been appointed for the summer term 2012. The Interim Principal has agreed to continue in a strategic and advisory role to support the next stage of transition.

The academy is a larger than average size secondary school with fewer than average ethnic minority students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The proportions of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities

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supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are broadly average.

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

In 2011, GCSE results showed a small increase in the proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, including English and mathematics, compared with the combined results of the predecessor schools in 2010. However, students made less progress in English and mathematics than in the predecessor schools. Students' overall GCSE point scores did not show improvement and boys' attainment declined. Compared with schools nationally, students made inadequate progress in English, mathematics and science. They also made inadequate progress overall in their best eight subjects; especially boys, students eligible for free school meals and those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities supported by school action. These weaknesses reflect poor option choices, which led some students to take less than eight accredited courses and the unsatisfactory provision for some disaffected students who took non-accredited courses off-site. These arrangements have now been changed. Students' relatively weak performance in physics and chemistry reflects the difficulty in recruiting specialist teachers in these subjects. Low achievement also reflects weaknesses in teaching and learning. In the first year of the academy, the frequent use of supply staff to cover staff absence disrupted the continuity of teaching and learning for some students. While the proportion of inadequate teaching is lower this term, there is not enough good or outstanding teaching to ensure students make rapid progress and catch up on past underachievement.

This term, the academy has communicated individual targets more effectively to students and teachers have started to regularly measure the progress of students in each year and subject. The first assessment in October 2011 indicated some improvement in rates of progress but it is too early to demonstrate sustained progress over time. In the current Year 11, more students than last year have gained an early GCSE at grade C or above in mathematics, and teacher assessments in English indicate improved achievement. These trends may indicate improved performance in 2012. Students' weak basic skills in literacy and numeracy are an impediment to learning. The academy has begun to tackle literacy with an effective accelerated reading programme and by a stronger emphasis on literacy in lessons. More students at Key Stage 3 are reading for pleasure; they are reading more demanding fiction and non-fiction; and the number of books borrowed from the library has increased significantly. Some students also lack skill and confidence in their spoken language. The lack of progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially in English and mathematics, is an area for further development.

Learning is at least satisfactory in the majority of lessons and students are cooperative. However, learning is inadequate in too many lessons. In some, this is due to the poor attitudes that a few students bring to the lesson. In others, students' disengagement is prompted by unchallenging teaching that is not focussed on their needs. In both cases, a few students fail to take responsibility for their learning and disengage when asked to work individually or in groups. Students enjoy learning best when they are clear about what they

are learning and why, and when practical activities enable them to succeed. Over the last term there has been a notable improvement in the overall climate for learning which is promoting better learning behaviour.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

In 2011, attendance was low and a little lower than the combined attendance of the predecessor schools. This term, attendance has increased compared with the same time last year. Persistence absence increased in the first year of the academy. Systems have recently been tightened and the recording of absence is more reliable. Levels of persistent absence are high but lower than at the same time last year. High persistent absence contributes to low achievement. Lack of punctuality was common during the first year of the academy. The new leaders have established firmer and higher expectations for students to arrive on time. In the initial phase of implementing this new and improved policy, recorded levels of lateness rose and more students received sanctions for lateness. The frequency of lateness has recently started to decrease.

Similarly, frequency of exclusion from the academy and from lessons within the academy rose as the new leaders rightly insisted on higher standards of behaviour, over the last term. The incidence of disruption in lessons has now begun to fall significantly, though it is still too high. An improvement in teachers' classroom management routines and use of sanctions and rewards has contributed to better behaviour. More consistent expectations have had a beneficial effect on teaching and learning. However, these expectations are not fully established by all staff, or accepted by all students, and attitudes to learning remain unsatisfactory in a few lessons. Behaviour has improved and on formal occasions such as assembly, students now conform to academy procedures. The academy has identified that the worst behaviour is confined to a small group of students many of whom have difficulties with literacy and numeracy and this has become a priority for improvement.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching is inconsistent, with too much satisfactory and inadequate teaching to secure the more rapid progress and higher attainment the academy aims to achieve. Some teaching is good and a little is outstanding. In an outstanding art lesson, an imaginative presentation and well-structured activities engaged students in independent research and in creating their own piece of batik work. Good and enthusiastic teaching provides specific guidance on the skills to be learnt and teachers explain tasks well. A well-planned sequence of activity systematically builds student skills and confidence through practical activity. In satisfactory lessons, better learning is impeded by insufficient challenge for the full range of abilities and missed opportunities to build on students' responses through questioning and dialogue. In these lessons, tasks consolidate rather than extend learning. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the learning tasks are low level, lack purpose and challenge and students respond with off-task behaviour and stop working. The academy has introduced helpful starter activities to lessons that are focussed on literacy. In the better lessons, this activity is linked to the content of the lessons. In weaker lessons, it is a

separate activity that slows the start of the lesson and sometimes involves students in unnecessary copying. The academy is using lesson objectives more systematically with clear links with assessment grades and levels. The quality of marking is sometimes cursory and superficial and procedures for providing praise and targets for improvement on students' work are inconsistent.

In June 2010, the academy rightly changed the timetable based on one-hundred-minute lessons which were too long for many classes and contributed to weaker behaviour and learning in some subjects. At the same time, the system of mixed-age tutor groups was ended which has since allowed a more effective focus on the needs of particular year groups, especially Year 11. The use of off-site provision is better matched to students' needs and more rigorously monitored. The academy is in the early stages of revising the curriculum to provide more suitable pathways for students of different abilities and interests. Liaison with the sixth form college has improved this term and there is early evidence of a higher level of aspirations and more applications for further education and training.

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

Since July 2011, the interim leaders have provided strong direction and a clear and robust programme for improvement. Weaknesses have been identified sharply and decisive action taken. Actions to improve behaviour and raise expectations are coherent and purposeful and have been welcomed by staff and students. The learning environment is calmer and more purposeful. Procedures are firmer and are leading to greater consistency across the academy sites. The high visibility of leaders and their good communication with staff and students has increased the morale of staff and the commitment of students. Relationships among staff and students are more positive and optimistic. Better communication with parents and carers and the local community has resulted in a recent increase in attendance at parents' evenings and a higher level of applications for admission for next year.

A tracking system with regular and detailed analysis of the progress of individuals and underachieving groups has been successfully implemented this term. The new and effective system of lesson observation identifies key actions for improvement by individuals. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses has informed the development of a well-structured programme of professional development and coaching which has just started. Judgements on the quality of teaching made by senior staff are accurate. More effective performance management and support has already strengthened some features of teaching and has resulted in a reduction in the proportion of inadequate teaching. Middle leaders have started to regularly review the progress of students and to extend support for students. In addition, the outcomes of lesson observation and subject leaders' scrutiny of work across the department are used to accurately identify strengths and areas for development within the subject. Analysis of students' work requires further development in order to improve the match of the curriculum and the subject-specific teaching to students' needs. Plans are being implemented well but actions have not been in place for long enough to see a sustained impact on student progress. The rapid pace of well-organised and effective change over the last term, the clear direction and the marked improvement in the

confidence of students, staff and parents and carers demonstrate a significantly improved capacity to improve.

## **External support**

The sponsors and the academy council have acted robustly to tackle under-performance and to bring about change in the academy which is now moving at a rapid rate. The Academy Council is now receiving more formal written reports on improvement with more informative data and analysis of progress. The sponsors provide leaders and other staff with good professional development opportunities including learning from good practice in other schools and academies.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made inadequate progress towards raising attainment.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Raise attainment, especially in English, mathematics and science and ensure that underachieving groups accelerate their progress by:
  - further developing and embedding the use of tracking and analysis to provide additional support for underachieving individuals and groups
  - analysing students' work more rigorously to ensure that the curriculum and the teaching precisely meet identified weaknesses in learning within the subject
  - ensuring that marking consistently provides praise and specific targets for improvement
  - continuing to reduce persistent absence.
- Rapidly increase the proportion of good teaching, and eradicate inadequate teaching, through the recently introduced and more rigorous programme of professional development, coaching and performance management.
- Improve the quality of learning and behaviour by:
  - ensuring that lessons more consistently challenge and interest students
  - further developing students' literacy, oracy and numeracy skills
  - further embedding routines, expectations and rewards for good behaviour.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr Bernard Campbell  
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2011