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Mr Reading  
The Principal  
The Oxford Academy  
Sandy Lane West  
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Oxford  
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Dear Mr Reading

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools with additional focus on behaviour: monitoring inspection of The Oxford Academy**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 27 March 2012, and for the information you provided during the inspection. Please extend my sincere thanks to the staff and students I visited in lessons, and to the members of the senior and middle leadership team, teachers and students I interviewed. Since January 2011 the academy has moved into a new building.

As a result of the inspection on 20–21 October 2010, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy has made satisfactory progress in making improvements, and the effectiveness of the academy in improving students' behaviour is satisfactory.

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

On entry to the school, students' attainment is very low. In particular, students arrive with low reading ages and poorly developed literacy and oracy skills. In 2010, 31% of Year 11 students achieved at least five A\* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics; a marked increase on the previous year. However, in 2011, only 28% of students achieved five A\* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, and this was well below the minimum floor standard. In 2011, the students' results reflected better achievement in mathematics than in English. The school's internal tracking and monitoring of current Year 11 students' progress indicate that, owing to targeted interventions, the proportion attaining A\* to C GCSE grades in English and mathematics is set to rise in 2012 with the majority of students making satisfactory and improving progress.

January 2012



The academy is monitoring carefully the achievement of those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and disaffected, those who do not attend regularly, and those with special educational needs. This is because in Year 11, these students' achievement is not improving as quickly as that of their peers.

Students make good progress where the learning objectives and clearly structured activities and questioning techniques help consolidate their knowledge and skills. Most students are keen to learn and settle quickly when given well-structured opportunities in lessons. Even when a few students interrupt learning through attention-seeking behaviour, others remain responsive and engaged in their learning. Given that many students have poor self-expression; inspectors observed that in some cases, teachers' questioning did not always help students develop confidence in articulating responses.

### **The quality of teaching**

Inspectors observed some variations in lessons. In a large number of lessons in mathematics, English, design and technology, information and communication technology, teaching was typically satisfactory and in a few cases, inadequate. In these lessons students were not fully challenged or supported in their learning by the tasks set. In those lessons that were good, teaching activities took account of students' abilities and their needs. For instance, in one English lesson, the teacher helped students rephrase their answers, ensuring they had used a wider range of appropriate and grammatically accurate expressions. In a science lesson, the use of probing questioning and clear explanations of scientific terms, together with a strong focus on literacy skills, enabled students to extend their learning.

Despite teachers now having clear, detailed information on students' prior attainment and greater moderation of their course work, a number were not planning their lessons sufficiently in line with their students' diverse ability levels. This resulted in the same activities and pace of learning for all. For instance, in one Year 11 English lesson, the character analysis task was not sufficiently well structured and did not take account of students with literacy and language needs. In addition, it did not offer more-able students sufficient opportunities to develop their extended writing and higher-order thinking skills.

Assessment activities, including peer- and self-assessment, are used inconsistently across English, mathematics and science to check learning and recognised as an area of development by the academy. As a result, students either do not understand the task, or find activities insufficiently challenging. Marking of students' work does not always give them detailed feedback on how to improve it, and students do not correct their work before moving on to the next stage of learning. Most of the students interviewed knew their learning targets, but a significant minority did not know specifically what they needed to do to meet them.

In recognition of the inconsistencies in teaching and assessment, the academy is rightly targeting support for students who underachieve in all three subjects through

more effective tracking of their progress, one-to-one tuition, learning mentoring support and out-of-school sessions.

The development of students' basic skills, in the main, is at early stages. Students are encouraged to read during tutor groups. These, together with the literacy strategies used in some subjects such as visual arts and science, and active partnerships with the feeder primary schools, are leading to students developing better writing and reading skills. In addition, the academy is gathering data on students' reading ages so as to better target those who need support with their comprehension skills. Across the academy, students' work varies in terms of handwriting, spelling and grammar and, in mathematics, a lack of precision in layout and measurement.

Owing to staffing changes and changes in infrastructure, the academy is establishing a new curriculum for information and communication technology. Although Year 11 results indicate satisfactory levels of achievement, in some cases, lessons do not maximise students' learning and students spend significantly long periods of time working at their stations. This results in a few losing concentration, becoming restless, and occasionally misbehaving.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Most students are courteous and well behaved. Behaviour is improving and is broadly satisfactory as a result of the recently introduced sanctions and rewards system. The academy has been successful in improving behaviour in lessons over time. However, in lessons where activities are not sufficiently absorbing, students lose attention, chatter and misbehave. Through a sustained focus on behaviour, previously high levels of exclusions are reducing slightly for disabled students and those with special educational needs. Students' attendance is low. Through learning mentors the academy is working actively with parents and carers to address this issue. Whilst the conduct of students around the academy is generally satisfactory, the school does not challenge students enough regarding their dress code, use of mobile phones or habit of eating in corridors. In a few cases, these lapses affect standards of behaviour in lessons.

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

Changes in staffing across the academy during 2010/11, combined with weaknesses in subject assessment, had a negative impact on students' outcomes in 2011, especially in English. The academy in recruiting staff to key positions is focusing on accelerating students' progress and improving the quality of teaching across the curriculum. Better tracking of students' achievement by senior and middle leaders is showing signs of improving levels of progress. Although in monitoring of the quality of teaching, there is too little focus on the impact of tasks and assessment activities in accelerating the progress of students. Recently, through external partnerships

with other institutions, the academy is focusing professional staff development and sharing of good practice on resolving the variable quality of teaching.

The governing body supports the academy effectively, especially through strategic decisions on financial investment that recognise the challenges faced. Within the context of staffing turbulence, senior leaders are now urgently prioritising greater consistency in teaching and assessment, and strengthening further the capacity of middle leaders. Critically, more effective tracking of underachieving students and supported interventions, especially in English and mathematics, are fostering more positive behaviour and attitudes to learning.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010**

- Improve the quality of teaching and, in particular, the use of assessment to improve students' attainment and progress by:
  - using secure assessment information to plan learning activities that support individual learning needs well
  - developing teachers' skills in the use of strategies to check that learning is taking place throughout the lesson
  - providing greater challenge and pace to accelerate students' progress
  - providing more opportunities for students to engage in active, participative learning.
  
- Improve students' achievement and progress in information and communication technology (ICT) by:
  - taking immediate action to eradicate inadequate teaching
  - establishing strong leadership that identifies the strengths and areas for further improvement accurately based upon secure evidence which is used to disseminate good practice and hold staff to account
  - engaging students through appropriate and challenging provision which meets needs and promotes rapid progress.