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Mr P Bishop
Acting Principal
Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy
Lower City Road
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Dear Mr Bishop

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy on 27 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. I am grateful for the time your staff and students gave to talk to me, and for the opportunity to talk with the Chair of the Governing Body, who also represented the Ormiston Academies Trust.

The Principal left her post at the end of the summer term, and an Acting Principal has been appointed. The governing body has advertised for a substantive Principal. The number of students on roll is increasing, both in the main academy and in the sixth form.

As a result of the inspection on 24 January 2012, the school 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The unconfirmed GCSE results for 2012 show that the proportion of students obtaining five passes at grades A* to C has increased sharply from 78% to 93%. The gaps between groups of students have also narrowed. Results in English were lower than expected, however, and this has held back the increase in the proportion obtaining five passes including English and mathematics. This has increased from 40% to 46%, but remains below the 2010 result. Students for whom English is not their first language did better than their peers but for most groups, on this measure, gaps between groups of students have narrowed only a little.

In lessons, students have more opportunities to take an active part in their work. In a Year 11 media studies lesson, students worked together in groups to research aspects of situation comedies, and then were responsible for teaching others in the class from what they had learned. The activity was constructed with clear learning objectives and with high expectations. As a result, students made outstanding progress and practised a range of important skills.

Students describe a range of interesting activities they have undertaken in class, from dissections in biology to debates in religious education. Some lessons observed required improvement for students to make good progress. In these lessons, students undertook tasks of a more closed nature and the range of skills expected of them was lower.

The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers are clearer about the prior attainment of their students, and of the activities that will provide for appropriate challenge. Academy leaders have a good grasp of the quality of teaching, and their records show that steady improvement is taking place. Thirty teachers are now taking part in a teaching and learning development group and, in addition, there is mentor support to help particular teachers develop their practice. Students have noticed that their lessons are more interesting, and comment how behaviour has improved. The academy is a calm and constructive environment, both in class and along the corridors.

The analysis and use of data have improved. Senior leaders, heads of department and pastoral leaders all have an understanding of data and the importance of analysing the progress of each individual and of groups of students. Middle and senior leaders meet regularly to analyse the progress of individuals in all year groups. A variety of intervention strategies is employed to enable students to catch up if they are in danger of falling behind. Emphasis is given to enhancing students' self-esteem as well as academic progress. Attention is given to students who are known to qualify for the pupil premium, but using data to shape the spending of pupil premium funding strategically is at an early stage and is not yet embedded. Some targets for the progress of more-able students have not been sufficiently challenging, and the academy is adapting its processes to rectify this.

Middle leaders are increasingly taking responsibility for improving the quality of students' achievement and for the quality of teaching. Heads of department have led training for their subject teams on the areas for improvement laid out in the Ofsted inspection report from January 2012. There are variations, however, in the impact of this work across different subject teams.

The Ormiston Academies Trust has provided a range of support for leadership and management and for some individual subjects. The statement of action provided by the governing body was assessed by Ofsted as fit for purpose in July 2012. An Ofsted Principal Officer asked, however, for changes to the plan to make clear how

the academy will keep parents and carers informed of action being taken and how their views will be taken into account. Currently, these changes to the plan have not yet been made, but the academy has improved its links with parents and some consultation exercises have taken place. External support for the academy has had a satisfactory impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Close the gaps in the progress made by different groups of students, and raise attainment further for all students, by:
 - ensuring teachers plan a range of activities that consistently meet the differing needs of individuals and groups of students
 - extending the range of strategies teachers use in their lessons to increase students' active involvement and to promote positive behaviour.

- Accelerate the rate of improvement and strengthen the impact of leadership by making greater use of the analysis of data on students' progress, especially that of different groups of students, to inform and evaluate development work.