

PROTECT-INSPECTION



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Mr A Burns
Ormiston Forge Academy
Wrights Lane
Cradley Heath
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Dear Mr Burns

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ormiston Forge Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 10–11 October 2012, 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

I observed the academy's work, observed 11 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, two groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, middle managers and a representative of the sponsor, the Ormiston Academies Trust.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

The academy conversion took place on 1 January 2012. The Principal took up his post then and the rest of the leadership team transferred from the predecessor school. In September 2012 new subject leaders took up their posts in English, mathematics and science. The academy is larger than the average comprehensive school, with an average proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, including those eligible for pupil premium funding. About 80% of students are of White British heritage, and most of the remainder are of Pakistani or Indian

heritage. The proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is similar to that of most schools. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also about average.

Since conversion, an area of the academy has been refurbished and has become a 'Success Centre', meeting the needs of students requiring extra support, mentoring or the provision of vocational subjects.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The unconfirmed GCSE results from summer 2012 show that the proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics increased from 48% to 58%. Results in mathematics, which had been low in the predecessor school, improved. However, there are still not enough of the more-able students achieving grades A and A* in mathematics. The proportion of students gaining two GCSE or equivalent passes at grades A* to C in science declined from 56% to 44%. However, this was in large measure due to a decision by the predecessor school to limit the number of students being entered. This policy has now been changed. Given that on entry to the academy students' attainment is well below the national average, the improvement in GCSE results is very encouraging, but improvement in science and further improvement in mathematics must now be a priority.

The progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is good, and very good progress is made by students of Pakistani heritage. Disabled students, and those with special educational needs, are also making good progress. Targets for improvement are mostly appropriate, but do not provide enough challenge for the most-able students.

At A level, the progress of students in the predecessor school was good. Early indications from the 2012 results indicate that this has been maintained.

Students say that the climate for learning has improved in the academy. Behaviour has improved, relationships with teachers are business-like but relaxed and lessons are more interesting. As a result, students feel that they are making much better progress. Observation of lessons confirms this, except in a minority of cases where teaching is less engaging.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. A particular strength is a core of teachers who deliver consistently high-quality lessons. These lessons are characterised by very high levels of student engagement as students take part in a range of interesting activities. A good pace is maintained and teachers ask high-quality questions to check and extend students' learning. In a Year 10 history lesson, for example, students made outstanding progress as they researched the reasons for the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. Having carried out research, including from sources, they

had to explain their results to other students. Teachers meet the needs of students who have particular needs well, and respond in their planning to students' individual education plans. A feature of the best teaching is the way students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is enhanced. This included, for example, a debate around moral issues in an English lesson developing speaking and listening skills.

Some teaching requires improvement. These lessons are less interesting, time is used less productively and students are less engaged in their learning. Teachers ask only closed questions that do not develop students' understanding or help teachers to gauge the extent of students' understanding. Students take a more passive role in their learning. The less imaginative planning, and the dominance of the teacher's role, leads to little development of any spiritual, moral, social or cultural awareness among students.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since the academy opened, a much more systematic and professional approach has been taken to behaviour management and students' behaviour has improved greatly as a result. There is now a clear structure for managing challenging behaviour and, in parallel, a structure for rewards. Incidents of poor behaviour are recorded and tracked well, and students report that any bullying is dealt with swiftly. Students say also that they feel safe in the academy, and are especially pleased that the academy site is now more secure at lunchtimes.

The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen sharply, and the number of recorded behaviour incidents within the academy is declining. Attendance is also much improved. The academy is a calm environment and most teachers use the behaviour systems well. In a small number of cases, teachers' less effective teaching skills are matched by lower skills in managing behaviour productively and not using the academy's behaviour management processes.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The improvement in the academy since it opened has been driven by the Principal and his senior team, who have a clear understanding of the changes needed and have demonstrated a good capacity to improve the academy further. Academy self-evaluation is perceptive, and academy plans are of good quality.

Good systems are in place to improve the quality of teaching. These include development groups, in-house professional development for teachers, personalised coaching and teachers learning in pairs from each other. The systems are supported by the core of high-quality teachers in the academy, some of whom are senior members of staff and some are still relatively new to the profession. The quality of the assessment of teaching does, however, vary between departments. In some, judgements are reliable; however, in some departments the quality of teaching has been judged too optimistically, and judgements are not consistent with the progress

that students in these subjects are making. External consultants, in their support for the academy, have not challenged this enough, and their own reports also fail to link students' achievement sufficiently to the quality of teaching.

Leaders in English, mathematics and science are very new in post. While they have not had time to demonstrate success as yet, their analysis of their departments is sharp and they have good plans for improvement. Subject and pastoral leaders make very good use of data relating to students' progress to make sure that students do not fall behind in their work.

Members of the governing body have a good grasp of the successes of the academy and of its future needs. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the governing body has had three Chairs over the nine months that the academy has been open. For the governing body to be fully effective, a period of stable leadership is now needed.

External support

The Ormiston Academies Trust, as sponsor, has provided a range of useful services to the academy. These have had some impact. As the Trust itself recognises, the support of external consultants commissioned by them has, at times, lacked sufficient rigour.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment and progress in mathematics and science so that all groups of students make progress that at least matches national expectations.
- Share existing good and outstanding practice across the academy so that in more lessons:
 - students experience active learning and higher order thinking
 - teachers use a wider range of questioning strategies that engage students in deeper reflection
 - students have more opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Standardise lesson observations to ensure that judgements made on the quality of teaching and learning are accurate across all departments.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

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Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Peter Bishop, Chair of the Governing Body, Ormiston Forge Academy
The Academies Advisers Unit, DfE