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5 February 2014

Mr A. Burns  
Principal  
Ormiston Forge Academy  
Wrights Lane  
Cradley Heath  
B64 6QU

Dear Mr Burns

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ormiston Forge Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 4 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, members of your senior leadership team, a group of students, the chair and other members of the Governing Body and the Ormiston Academy Trust education adviser, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I undertook a learning walk with two members of your senior leadership team. This involved brief observations in a range of mathematics and English lessons. I also accompanied you on a walk around the academy grounds at break time in order to observe behaviour and how students interact with each other out of lesson time. The academy's improvement and action plans and the self-evaluation were evaluated.

### **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection in November 2013, five new members of staff have been recruited and four teachers have left the academy. New staff include a consultant vice principal on a temporary contract and middle leaders for English, humanities, mathematics and science. Teachers of humanities, ICT, modern languages and science have left the academy.

## **Main findings**

Well-judged action and improvement plans to tackle each of the areas for improvement identified in the section 55 report were drawn up immediately following the inspection. The Principal's prompt and well-directed response to these areas for improvement reflect the rigorous approach he has taken to driving improvement since joining the academy two years ago.

Following the section 5 inspection, the Principal identified that monitoring and evaluation processes in the academy were too complicated and thus not as effective as they might be. A consultant vice principal has been appointed to streamline and sharpen systems to ensure they are more cohesive and more effective in providing relevant information to drive improvement.

A restructured senior leadership team will be introduced in the summer term with the intention that individual strengths will be used where they will have maximum impact. Additional senior leaders for literacy and numeracy, priority areas for the school, will be in place by the autumn term. Reviews by the Academy Trust education adviser suggest that there is still variation in the quality of middle leadership and particularly in the extent to which all middle leaders are developing their leadership as opposed to management skills. Senior leaders recognise this and are tightening systems of accountability to ensure middle leaders in all areas perform as well as the best. Performance management is now effective in linking teachers' and leaders' movement up the pay scale with their performance in meeting targets related to students' outcomes.

A more structured approach to the improvement of teaching and learning based on termly priorities has been introduced. This is supported by a cycle of regular meetings to encourage high quality dialogue and focussed actions within subject areas in order to embed the termly priorities in practice. There is some indication that this is already having a positive impact by helping staff and leaders to focus their attention more clearly on key areas and to be able assess the impact of training and development more accurately.

Comprehensive and rigorous systems to monitor the quality of teaching are supported by well-directed, professional development that now meets the individual needs of teachers. Examples already exist of the effectiveness of this process in bringing about improvements in the quality of individual teacher's performance. The use of 'drop-ins' and learning walks by senior leaders are valuable for giving an indication of the quality of teaching on a daily basis. However, the longer notice

teachers receive of when extended observations will take place is less likely to provide leaders with a secure view of whether they have met their stated aim for teaching to be 'good all day, every day'.

Systematic tracking of students' progress and regular meetings of academic and pastoral staff to discuss the progress of every student in Year 11 are now in place. Early indications suggest that this regular and forensic review of each student's progress ensures interventions are introduced promptly and progress is accelerating. This strategy has been accompanied by more effective communication with students about their targets, their progress and their individual needs and by improved information to parents and greater efforts to engage all parents.

Leaders acknowledge there is still too much variation in the quality of teaching and, as a result, it is not yet having a sufficiently positive impact on student outcomes. While weaker teaching has been concentrated in core subjects, and particularly in mathematics and science, this is now improving. English and mathematics lessons visited during the learning walk, included teaching that was good, students who were fully engaged, challenged according to their abilities, and making at least good progress. Feedback in books was variable, but there were examples of good practice, such as students responding to teachers' feedback about how to improve. Students knew their targets and knew whether they were working at an appropriate level in order to meet these targets. To encourage achievement, students in some lessons were in single sex classes. Students appear to like this arrangement and explain that it encourages them to focus more on their learning. The school has yet to evaluate the success of this strategy. In the meeting with students and in the lessons observed, students were unreservedly positive about their relationships with their teachers and the excellent support they receive. School records suggest that behaviour management is improving and observation of students outside the school at break time indicated calm and respectful behaviour.

Governors are highly supportive, increasingly knowledgeable about the academy's performance and regularly challenge leaders. They have undertaken their own self-evaluation and review of their strengths and weaknesses. An action plan to improve those areas in need of development is in place, focussed on maximising governors' individual and collective contribution to strong governance of the academy. They are supported well by the Academy Trust.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

Very good support for, and challenge to, academy leaders is provided by the Ormiston Academy Trust and its education adviser. Termly visits and annual reviews ensure regular and thorough monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance. In addition, support is provided by other Principals in the Ormiston Academy Trust.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the DfE Academies Advisers Unit [[colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk)] and the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**