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8 October 2014

Ms Fiona O'Sullivan
Principal
Oasis Academy MediaCityUK
King William Street
Salford Quays
Manchester
M50 3UQ

Dear Ms O'Sullivan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy MediaCityUK

Following my visit to your school on 7 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, a representative of Oasis Community Learning, which sponsors the academy, the Chair of the Academy Council, senior and middle leaders, groups of six teachers and ten students and the Principal of another academy within the chain of academies. I visited classrooms accompanied by you and the deputy principal. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated. I examined other documents including the minutes of meetings of the Academy Council, the action plan for mathematics, the sponsor's first review of the academy's progress since the previous inspection, the report from the review of the use of the pupil premium, provisional findings from the first stage of the review of governance and other information relating to students' achievement, safeguarding and the quality of teaching. I scrutinised the single central record.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been changes to leadership and governance. A new Principal and deputy principal have joined the academy. The previous Principal and all except one of the other members of the previous academy leadership team have left the academy. Two interim assistant principals have been appointed. Four teachers have left the academy and six teachers have been appointed.

Five teaching posts are currently advertised and an additional deputy principal post is vacant. Three additional heads of year have been appointed to give one for each year group and five pastoral leaders have also been appointed. The Academy Council has been extended with a new Chair and other new members including two parents, two representatives of the community, a representative of the local authority and three members of staff. New policies have been introduced, including for safeguarding, assessment, target setting and marking. An electronic system to record any safeguarding or welfare concerns has been installed. The academy's timetable and the curriculum have been changed. A staffroom has been created and building work to further improve the safety of students is planned.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The sponsor, senior leaders and Academy Council have accepted the findings of the inspection and show a clear determination to work in partnership to bring about rapid improvement. This determination is based on recognition of the value of each student and the importance of providing the best possible standard of education for all of them. The academy faces many challenges, but the most urgent of these have started to be tackled.

The sponsor recognises that, in the past, it failed to prevent the many weaknesses in the academy. However, following the inspection, it took immediate and robust action to improve the academy's leadership. This included bringing forward the arrival of the new Principal and arranging for a new deputy principal to join her. In addition, the sponsor has taken steps to ensure that the local and regional arrangements for governance of the academy provide effective challenge and appropriate support to academy leaders. It has reinforced local governance in the appointment of the new Chair of the Academy Council. While the changes to the council are very recent, the Chair has already secured the commitment of the existing members and started to work with the new members. Pairings between council members and leaders of key aspects of the academy's work have been identified. These reflect the council's intention to check that the necessary improvements progress as expected. They are also the first steps in response to the initial findings of the review of governance.

The Principal and other senior leaders are providing clear and committed leadership. Their roles and responsibilities are clear and interim arrangements have been made to cover the tasks to be taken on by the new deputy principal still to be appointed. Leaders have developed a new vision and set out clear values for the academy, ensuring that students and staff have made a proper contribution to these. Students are being given more opportunities to make a bigger contribution to developments in the academy. A student council has been set up and student leaders identified in each year group.

Expectations of the acceptable standards of students' behaviour have been raised. In general, students welcome this change and understand why it is important and how it helps their learning and safety. A very small number of students have found it hard to meet the raised expectations and this has led to firm action being taken. In consequence, the number of students excluded from the academy has increased. Teachers told me that students' attitudes have improved with, for example, students now 'saying good morning rather than just barging past'. Students say they feel safer and that there is less disruption to learning.

Senior leaders have increased the accountability of middle leaders and teachers. New line management arrangements include regular meetings to discuss students' progress. Previous data on achievement had not been collected accurately enough as was indicated by the concerning, unpredicted further falls in the achievement of Year 11 students in 2014. There are no reliable baselines for the starting points of students for this academic year. This is currently being addressed by a first round of systematic assessment. Leaders intend to repeat it regularly so that teachers can better plan for learning. The review of the use of the pupil premium has indicated ways in which the gaps in achievement for disadvantaged students may be closed. Academy leaders have prepared plans to set out how the funding will be used. It is important that detailed information about the achievement of disadvantaged students is used to check that the plans are having the required impact.

An external review of the academy's work to ensure that students are well looked after and safe has been completed. Senior leaders' subsequent overhaul of the processes and systems in place means that students are now properly safeguarded. The new system to record any incidents is being closely monitored by academy leaders to allow patterns to be identified. It is contributing to the basic information that the heads of year and pastoral leaders need to provide effective care and success for students. Students with any safeguarding concerns now have clear information about staff who can help them because it is widely displayed in the academy. However, access to similar information for parents is not as straightforward because the most obvious link on the academy's webpage leads to a detailed but general policy provided by the sponsor rather than to direct information about who can provide support.

A weekly programme of training to improve teaching has been put in place. This has already led to new approaches to marking. Senior leaders have observed all teachers to check on their effectiveness. Less effective teachers are expected to take part in specific training. Where teachers have not been able to improve, further action has been taken. Additional coaching and other support are being provided to ensure mathematics improves particularly quickly. Teachers say they now feel they belong to a team which is being well led. Their morale is generally good.

There are early signs of improvement in many respects but much remains to be done to embed the initial changes and build the deep change that is still needed. The sponsor is brokering a very significant amount of additional support from inside and outside Oasis Community Learning to give the academy the additional expertise and capacity it currently needs. This includes support from three teaching schools, Blessed Thomas Holford Roman Catholic College Teaching School, Oasis Innovation Teaching School Alliance and St Patrick's RC High School together with support from other local effective schools. A National Leader of Governance is providing support to the Academy Council through the review of governance. The local authority is contributing to the improvement in teaching and learning.

The sponsor's statement of action provides a secure framework to drive and evaluate the improvement in the academy. As part of this, the sponsor commits to monthly visits by its Chief Executive and National Academy Improvement Director and review meetings to monitor the progress of the academy. A detailed initial review has been completed and has provided helpful information in planning further improvement. The academy's improvement plan is comprehensive, although it should now be refined to ensure that all the intended actions are prioritised, clearly specified and have tight success criteria. In addition, staged improvements towards final targets should be indicated. More detail is also required on who will monitor that actions have been completed and how and when this will be done and similar, but separate, information on the evaluation of their impact. Without these, it will be harder to ensure that successes are recognised, emerging gaps are picked up and additional actions planned so that rapid improvement remains on track. Both the academy's improvement plan and the sponsor's statement of action have more emphasis on actions towards the earlier part of this academic year. It is important leaders double-check that actions are distributed so that there is no risk of the pace of improvement slowing.

The single central record meets requirements.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Department for Education – Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Academy Council, the Chief Executive Officer of Oasis Community Learning and the Director of Children’s Services for Salford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby

Her Majesty’s Inspector