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Wednesday 26 May 2010

Mrs Julie Winterman  
Oasis Academy Brightstowe  
Penpole Lane  
Shirehampton  
Bristol  
BS11 0EB

Dear Mrs Winterman

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Oasis Academy Brightstowe

## Introduction

Following my visit with Chris Nye HMI to your academy on 24 and 25 May 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, students on the school council, the vice-chairman of the academy council and the sponsor's Director of Education.

## Context

The Oasis Academy Brightstowe opened in September 2008 and has specialisms in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) and Business and Enterprise. The predecessor school had already moved into new buildings in January 2006. The building is shared with the Kingsweston Centre, which offers provision for 42 students with autistic spectrum disorder and is not linked to the academy. Until the beginning of this academic year, the local authority was using some of the rooms in the academy building.

The academy is sponsored by Oasis Community Learning, who operate a community office from the building. There are currently 496 students aged 11 to 16 years on roll. The area served by the academy is one of significant social and



economic disadvantage with just over a quarter of students eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of students are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. About a third of all students have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Most of the staff of the predecessor school transferred to the academy when it opened. The principal joined the predecessor school as a local authority advisory headteacher in 2007 and was then appointed permanently to the academy. She is due to retire at the end of this term and her replacement has already been appointed. Only three teacher members of the current leadership team will be in post in September. The appointments process is underway and will also involve some re-organisation of roles and responsibilities within the team.

The academy planned to open a sixth form in September 2010. Due to the change in principal this has been deferred and is due for review next year.

### Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is exceptionally low, particularly for the current Year 11 and there is a substantial legacy of underachievement in all year groups. Even though standards on entry to Year 7 were higher this year than previously, over half of these students arrived at the academy with reading and spelling skills well below those expected for their age. This limits the progress they can make. Since the academy opened there has been a strong focus on developing students' literacy skills. A specific programme to raise reading ages right across the academy has allowed many students to make very significant progress in a short time. The academy's leaders recognise that the emphasis now needs to be extended to include development of writing skills.

The atmosphere is calm and purposeful and the academy has high expectations of students, both in terms of their achievement and their behaviour. Students and staff describe a significant change in attitude since the academy opened. Many students are able and willing to talk about the progress they are making, with even the most reluctant learners enjoying learning as a result of better teaching.

Attainment remains low, but is rising strongly overall by the end of Key Stage 4, with nearly all indicators moving towards the national average. The current Year 11 is on course to comfortably exceed the national minimum expectation for the proportion of students attaining five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics. This prediction, while still low, is above the academy's extremely challenging targets. All Year 11 students are expected to leave in 2010 with some GCSE or equivalent qualifications, and almost all have already secured a place in further training or employment.

In the academy's first year, students in Year 11 made satisfactory progress from their starting points. Current predictions indicate that students will make good

progress in 2010. This is largely a result of carefully targeted personalised intervention for students in Key stage 4. Progress in Years 7 to 9 is not as secure as in Years 10 and 11, although the focus on developing literacy, numeracy and learning skills is already beginning to have an impact. Formal tracking data for these year groups are less reliable and therefore cannot be used effectively to trigger meaningful personalised intervention.

However, a very rigorous system of reviews with individual teachers ensures that students' progress is monitored regularly. Teaching is not strong enough however, to enable students to make good, rather than satisfactory, progress in lessons. There are examples of some students making exceptional progress both academically and personally as a result of a good Key Stage 4 curriculum and inspired teaching, but this is not consistent across the academy.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, largely as a result of support from a strong team of learning assistants and an appropriate curriculum at Key Stage 4. Skilled and regular support for the few students who are at the early stages of learning English ensures that they make rapid progress in acquiring the language skills that will allow them access to the wider curriculum.

#### Other relevant pupil outcomes

Relationships between staff and students and between students are very positive. There is a strong sense of community not just for students, but also for staff, who work together very effectively in teams. The vertical house system encourages good communication between different year groups and healthy competition. Students recognise how the school has improved as a community and they feel a strong sense of pride in their contribution to achieving this. A strong feature is the academy's work in raising students' self-esteem. For example students, many of whom have overcome past difficulties, volunteered to be 'heroes' to represent the academy in visits to feeder primary schools. Students' commitment to learning is increasing and this is reflected in the steady improvement in attendance since the academy opened. Rigorous analysis and a targeted approach, including a breakfast club and celebration teas with the principal for good attenders, have also had an impact on the proportion of students who are persistently absent.

Around the academy behaviour is generally good. Whole-academy systems for managing behaviour are effective and well understood by students, but are not always consistently applied in lessons. Behaviour in classrooms is often linked to the quality of teaching. When there is too much talking by the teacher and not enough active involvement in learning, or work is not matched to individual needs, students become bored and this leads to low-level disruption. Students feel safe and know who to go to when there is a problem. They believe that the counsellors are helpful and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Students have a satisfactory preparation for life beyond school. Although literacy and numeracy skills remain weak overall, students' ICT skills are well developed.

Students also have opportunities to develop leadership skills and business and enterprise skills, for example at the very successful Christmas market earlier this year.

### The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning satisfactory overall, although there are examples of good and outstanding practice, with a small proportion of lessons still unsatisfactory. The academy's records show that the quality of teaching has improved over the last two years, and the proportion of inadequate lessons has reduced. The improvement is a result of focused professional development, coaching and training in behaviour management to avoid confrontation. Although most are anxious to get better, teachers do not recognise fully that the key to raising students' attainment is improving the quality of learning in the classroom. Planning is generally consistent and ICT is used well to support learning. However, in satisfactory lessons, teachers frequently talk too much, the pace is too slow, students are not sufficiently active and do not have ownership of their learning. In better lessons students enthusiastically take part because the activities are well matched to their needs and questioning encourages them to think for themselves. A strong team of learning assistants provides support in classrooms. Students with behavioural difficulties have their needs met particularly well with clear strategies for teachers to use. Although there are individual educational plans for those with particular learning needs, the impact of these is not consistently evident in classrooms, with teachers reliably applying strategies which will meet individual needs.

Students are aware of the ambitious targets that are set for them, and how far they are towards meeting them, but do not always have subject-specific strategies that will help them to improve. When students have the opportunity to assess their own work, they learn quickly if the teacher is absolutely clear about what they need to look for. Much oral feedback from teachers is thorough and helpful. The whole-school focus on literacy means that when marking is done well, aspects of literacy are covered as well as content, and students say that this consistency is helpful. However, the quality of marking is very variable between departments and between teachers.

Great care is taken to ensure that students have a good induction into the academy in Year 7, and guidance for Key Stage 4 options and post-16 destinations is exceptionally thorough. For example, all parents attended individual interviews to discuss GCSE course choices for Year 9 students this year. Teachers know their students very well and can ensure that the courses they follow are well matched to their needs. This is supported by developments to the Key Stage 4 curriculum since the academy opened, particularly the expansion of the number and variety of

vocational courses on offer. Alternative curriculum provision for a small group of students, focusing on developing skills for future employment and developing students' self-esteem has led to some students making exceptional progress, not just in terms of assessment results, but also personal attributes, such as confidence, team working and initiative. As a result of this better curriculum, the proportion of students leaving the academy without employment education or training has reduced significantly

In order to tackle the low levels of attainment on entry to the academy the Year 7 curriculum focuses on developing key skills with a strong emphasis on daily lessons in literacy and numeracy. This programme ensures that the needs of all students are met, including those who are more able. The academy is moving towards starting GCSE level work in English mathematics and science in Year 9, and the results of examination modules already completed show that this is having a positive impact on achievement and thus on motivation.

The academy's specialisms of mathematics and ICT are under-developed. However, standards in both subjects, but particularly ICT, are rising.

#### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal provides extremely strong direction for the academy. Since the academy opened she has created a sense of shared purpose, ambition to improve, and mutual support. Throughout this process staff have been consulted and involved in key decisions, so they have ownership of the new strategies such as those to improve behaviour and marking. She has however also taken some decisive and sometimes difficult actions when they have been needed. The impact of effective leadership is clearly seen in improving outcomes – attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress.

A strong infrastructure is now in place, with a well understood cycle of monitoring, planning, implementation and evaluation. This is clearly linked to performance management for staff and professional development. Self-evaluation is accurate and thorough. The senior leadership team and the governing body are well aware of academy's strengths and shortcomings. Strategic planning is clear, targeted on those areas in most urgent need of change and is constantly monitored. However, although they have focused on a wide range of critical issues, and staff feel very accountable for outcomes for their students, leaders across the academy do not focus sufficiently sharply on raising the quality of teaching and learning as the key priority.

A series of unforeseen circumstances and the pending retirement of the principal mean that the senior leadership team is under capacity and in a state of transition. The absence of key staff at senior level and the variable skills of middle managers mean that systems are not yet fully embedded. Ensuring secure and inspirational

leadership for the coming academic year is a priority for the sponsors and the governing body. They are very clear about the importance of managing this process rigorously and sensitively, in order to maintain the confidence of the academy community and the momentum of improvement.

The sponsor has a commitment to improving the lives of the whole community and the academy is part of that vision. The increasing involvement of the parents and wider community in the work of the academy is already evident and supporting the drive for improvement.

The single central record of recruitment and vetting checks meets requirements.

### External support

Senior and middle leaders are making good use of external support from a range of sources, particularly through the sponsor's own senior staff leaders. Although the quality of middle leadership is variable, skills are developing rapidly as a result of the support being provided. The School Improvement Partner has an accurate and appropriately critical but supportive view of the academy's work and has provided clear guidance particularly in analysis of data. During the transition from the predecessor school, an external organisation worked very successfully with students and staff to develop a positive ethos and raise students' self-esteem.

### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Focus more sharply on moving the quality of teaching and learning to consistently good or better
- Ensure that the academy's leadership at all levels has the capacity to maintain the pace of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the academy council and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors

the Academies Group, Department for Education [ [Paul.hann@dcsgsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsgsi.gov.uk) ]

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - chair of governors
- DCSF - Academies Group [Paul.hann@dcsgsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsgsi.gov.uk)

The letters should also be copied electronically to:

[paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk) - the HMI with national responsibility for academies  
each member of the inspection team,  
the PO for SCC

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

- lead HMI
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