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11 March 2015

Mr John Murphy  
Chief Executive Officer  
Oasis Community Learning Trust  
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21–24 Millbank  
London  
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Dear Mr Murphy

### **Focused inspection of Oasis Multi-Academy Trust**

Following the focused inspection of a number of Oasis academies and the subsequent follow-up visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors Catherine Anwar, Julie Winyard and Brian Blake, I am writing on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

Thank you for your cooperation and that of all the staff whom we met during our visit on 9 and 10 March 2015. We particularly appreciate the time and care taken to prepare the programme for us. Please pass on our thanks to your staff and other stakeholders who kindly gave up their time to meet us.

### **Evidence**

Ten academies were inspected as part of the focused inspection between 2 and 5 March 2015. Eight of these inspections were section 5 inspections and two were section 8 monitoring inspections. Telephone discussions were held with the principals of 20 other academies on 3 and 4 March 2015. During our follow-up visit to Oasis national office, discussions were held with senior and operational staff from the trust, principals, governors, strategic partners and other stakeholders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of relevant documentation.

### **Context**

Oasis Community Learning Trust (OCL) was established in 2004. There are now 44 academies in the trust. These include 16 secondary academies, two all-through academies and 26 primary academies. The academy trust has grown rapidly, taking on 30 new academies in the last three years; 17 of these have joined in the last two years. There is one teaching school in the trust. Academies are now organised into regions, each led by a Regional Academy Director.

You took up the post of Chief Executive Officer of OCL in September 2014. The National Director of Academy Improvement was appointed in September 2014. OCL leaders and the OCL board carry out the statutory functions of governance, while each academy has an academy council to oversee its links with the local community.

## **Summary findings**

The trust's academies have a variable record of improvement. While some have improved or sustained effective performance, too many academies have not improved quickly enough. A legacy of weak challenge and insufficiently systematic or rigorous improvement work has resulted in slow or little improvement for nearly half the academies. The record of improvement is much stronger in some regions than in others. You recognise the need to accelerate the pace of improvement in individual academies and you have taken action to increase rigour in your monitoring since September 2014. Regional Academy Directors now have targets for improving academies more quickly: the new and more ambitious target is to move an academy from 'requires improvement' to outstanding within five years.

Across the trust, some groups of pupils do not achieve well. Disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys, make significantly less progress than their peers nationally. Although in some academies this gap is closing, in too many it is not and, overall, it remains a concern. Recently introduced systems and processes show, as yet, limited impact on improved outcomes for pupils. The trust's leaders have prioritised specific areas of improvement, including the poor achievement of disadvantaged boys. However, there is no evidence of an overall strategy or plan that focuses on these particular issues.

The trust has good systems to collect and review a range of data about its academies' performance. Academies submit data every seven weeks, providing the trust's leaders with a detailed and regular overview of their performance. Most Regional Academy Directors make appropriate use of this information to monitor academies' performance and they undertake regular visits to follow up any issues.

All academies are subject to formal annual reviews by the trust's leaders. In addition to the ongoing scrutiny of data about pupils' achievement, the review process includes lesson observations, examination of pupils' work, observation of pupils' behaviour, discussions with pupils and analysis of the quality of teaching and leadership. Primary headteachers say that they find these review visits helpful. However, the quality of these review reports at primary level is poor. The reports lack detailed analysis, are not evaluative and do not identify precise areas for improvement. In addition, they do not make it clear when and how any improvement points will be reviewed. Reports do not therefore provide the trust's leaders with enough information to track improvement or spot decline sharply or rapidly enough. While the trust's leaders acknowledge this significant shortcoming, they have only just begun to address it: even recent primary reviews are poor. Since September, reviews of secondary academies have become more robust. Recent secondary review

reports provide stronger challenge and thorough evaluation and identify clear points for improvement.

Information from regional academy directors' visits to academies is provided to the National Director of Academy Improvement and is now better used to inform the appropriate provision of support and training. Academy leaders report that data are used particularly well to identify the precise support needed by new academies. External consultants are brokered by the trust to provide individual academies with specific support. Although leaders say that they welcome this support, there is limited evidence of its impact on standards. Several reports written by external consultants lack detail, demonstrate little challenge and do not review the impact of their work with academies. Support is increasingly being provided by skilled practitioners identified from within the stronger academies. Academy leaders are positive about this development and there are signs of early impact on the quality of teaching and leadership.

The work of the teaching school is beginning to have a positive impact on the work of other academies. In particular, the leadership programme is helping to improve the quality of senior and middle leadership in a number of academies. The teaching school is situated in the north west and as such is not able to reach all the academies in the trust. The trust's leaders have recognised this and, as a result, regional lead academies are being set up in other regions so that good practice can be shared and implemented more widely.

The trust makes good use of its strongest leaders. However, there is limited leadership capacity within the trust and this slows progress, when, for example, a Regional Academy Director has to act as an Executive Principal in addition to their other role. There is also potential confusion between the role of the National Director of Academy Improvement and that of the Regional Academy Directors. There is lack of clarity about the extent of each person's responsibility and accountability for the direct improvement of an academy or for the quality assurance of any improvement work and its impact. This inefficiency is slowing progress in some academies. Line management of OCL leaders has, until recently, not been sufficiently rigorous and this has led to inadequate communication in some areas.

Regional and national conferences provide beneficial opportunities for the sharing of good practice and leadership development and support. However, trust leaders acknowledge that there is currently limited capacity to offer strong subject-level support across the trust and this needs improvement.

The trust's model of governance is clear and well-understood by all. Regional Academy Directors attend each academy council in their region on a regular basis. This links the trust's central governance with the work of local governing bodies. The responsibility for performance management of academy principals lies with the Regional Academy Director. The chair of the academy council contributes to this process. While the trust provides overarching national policies, each academy council

may adapt these according to local need. Nevertheless, until very recently, governance has not been effective enough to support the rapid improvement required in many OCL academies.

The trust's strong and distinctive community ethos is communicated very effectively to all academies. Rightly, the trust links its school improvement and community development work, recognising that the one supports the other. Principals speak enthusiastically of being part of the Oasis 'family' and the benefits of collaboration and support that this brings.

Responsibility for the trust's safeguarding and child protection policy has, until now, been held by the human resources department. A lack of robust evaluation and monitoring of the policy by trust leaders has led to shortcomings and omissions. This has contributed to poor safeguarding practice in at least one academy. The trust's leaders have now begun to improve the policy to ensure that it provides academies with appropriate safeguarding guidance. However, there is still much work to do to ensure that all relevant and recent legislation covering potential risks posed to children is taken fully into account. It is also vital that leaders ensure that the policy is reviewed and updated regularly, as this has not been the case in the past.

## **Recommendations**

- Ensure that disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys, make more rapid progress across the trust's academies so that they catch up with their peers.
- Evaluate the impact of all work with academies so that it leads to rapid and sustained improvement.
- Further develop the work of the trust's teaching school and other strong practitioners to support rapid improvement for those academies that have remained 'static' for too long.
- Ensure, through rigorous quality assurance, that reviews of primary academies are as robust and challenging as reviews of secondary academies.
- Review and update all of the trust's policies regularly, particularly the safeguarding and child protection policies, taking into account recent and relevant legislation, especially that relating to the welfare of children.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex: Academies that are part of Oasis Community Learning Trust

### Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – section 5 inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection judgement (date)	Inspection grade in March 2015
Oasis Academy Aspinal	North West	Manchester	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	3
Oasis Academy Coulsdon	London	Croydon	09/2008	2 (2011)	2
Oasis Academy Hobmoor	West Midlands	Birmingham	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	2
Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey	South East	Kent	01/2014	3 (2013) (under previous sponsorship arrangements)	3
Oasis Academy Johanna	London	Lambeth	09/2011	Not previously inspected as an academy	2
Oasis Academy Skinner Street	South East	Medway	09/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	4 (special measures)
Oasis Academy Boulton	West Midlands	Birmingham	05/2013	Not previously inspected as an academy	2
Oasis Academy Longmeadow	South West	Wiltshire	04/2012	Not previously inspected as an academy	3

### Academies inspected as part of the focused inspection – monitoring inspections

Academy name	Region	Local authority area	Opening date as an academy	Most recent s5 inspection grade and date	Monitoring inspection judgement, March 2015
Oasis Academy Mayfield	South East	Southampton	09/2008	3 (2014)	Taking effective action
Oasis Academy MediaCityUK	North West	Salford	09/2008	4 (special measures) (2014)	Reasonable progress

## Other academies

Academy name	Region	Local authority	Opening date as an academy	Most recent inspection grade and date
Oasis Academy Bank Leaze	South West	City of Bristol	09/2012	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Blakenhale Infants	West Midlands	Birmingham	03/2013	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Blakenhale Junior	West Midlands	Birmingham	03/2013	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Brightstowe	South West	City of Bristol	09/2008	2 (2015)
Oasis Academy Byron	London	Croydon	09/2012	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Connaught	South West	City of Bristol	09/2012	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Enfield	London	Enfield	09/2007	2 (2010)
Oasis Academy Firvale	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Sheffield	09/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Foundry	West Midlands	Birmingham	02/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Hadley	London	Enfield	09/2009	2 (2012)
Oasis Academy Harpur Mount	North West	Manchester	01/2013	2 (2014)
Oasis Academy Henderson Avenue	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	01/2013	2 (2014)
Oasis Academy Hextable	South East	Kent	09/2013	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Immingham	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	09/2008	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy John Williams	South West	City of Bristol	09/2008	2 (2013)
Oasis Academy Limeside	North West	Oldham	09/2011	1 (2013)
Oasis Academy Lister Park	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Bradford	09/2013	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Long Cross	South West	City of Bristol	01/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Lords Hill	South East	Southampton	09/2008	3 (2013)
Oasis Academy New Oak	South West	City of Bristol	09/2012	2 (2014)
Oasis Academy Nunsthorpe	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	09/2012	3 (2014)

Oasis Academy Oldham	North West	Oldham	09/2010	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Parkwood	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North Lincolnshire	11/2013	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Pinewood	London	Havering	10/2013	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Ryelands	London	Croydon	05/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Shirley Park	London	Croydon	09/2009	1 (2013)
Oasis Academy Short Heath	West Midlands	Birmingham	03/2014	2 (2014)
Oasis Academy Silvertown	London	Newham	09/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy South Bank	London	Lambeth	09/2013	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Warndon	West Midlands	Worcestershire	10/2013	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Watermead	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Sheffield	09/2014	Not yet inspected as an academy
Oasis Academy Wintringham	North East, Yorkshire and Humber	North East Lincolnshire	09/2007	3 (2014)
Oasis Academy Woodview	West Midlands	Birmingham	03/2013	2 (2014)