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3 November 2011

Ms Helen Plaice  
Headteacher  
Todmorden High School  
Ewood Lane  
Todmorden  
West Yorkshire  
OL14 7DG

Dear Ms Plaice

### **Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Todmorden High School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I and James Kidd, additional inspector, inspected your school on 2 November 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please forward our thanks to your students for their help during the inspection.

Since the last inspection a new headteacher has taken up post and the deputy headteacher chose to step down from his responsibilities in September 2011 and is to be replaced in January 2012 through an external appointment. The senior management team has been reorganised and will undergo further reorganisation during the current academic year. A new head of mathematics was appointed and took up post in September 2010. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection on 16 and 17 of June 2010 the school was asked to tackle the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

New tracking and monitoring systems provide a stronger focus on improvement. Intervention strategies are in place and beginning to impact on improved standards in lessons and in the quality of students' written work. Senior and middle leaders recognise that the key challenge for the school is to accelerate and sustain improvement in GCSE pass rates and especially in mathematics, for boys and students known to be eligible for free school meals. The new head of mathematics is acutely aware of what needs to be improved and has introduced strategies and new approaches to tackle underperformance in Years 11 and 10 as well as building more secure foundations in Years 7 and 8. The attainment and progress of higher-ability students has improved as a result of the introduction of well planned and monitored strategies. Because of effective intervention strategies attendance

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continues to improve and is currently just over 93%. Students engage well with each other, staff and other adults. Of the students observed in classes and around the school inspectors noted that their behaviour was of a consistently good standard.

During the monitoring visit inspectors undertook a series of short visits or learning walks, to a wide range of subjects to assess the learning and progress students made. Since the last inspection the school has placed a greater focus on improved quality assurance of lesson observations. A well-focused observation programme linked to professional development promotes an emphasis on the impact of learning and sharing of good practice. Middle leaders have greater involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Well-planned and systematic intervention strategies support weaker teachers and promote improvement. Learning walks provided evidence of more interactive lessons with greater student involvement, enjoyment and learning opportunities. There were examples of good teaching in all the areas observed. Assessment practice better informs planning and the next steps in learning. Students confirmed that lessons had become more enjoyable and that behaviour had improved over the last twelve months. Inspectors agreed with the school assessment that teaching remains satisfactory but improving. However, too many lessons in mathematics were slow in pace and were too teacher-focused. School managers acknowledge the need to develop strategies further to promote independent learning, paired and group work activity better so as to enhance the development of study and oracy skills. The learning walks also confirmed a greater use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching but little direct use of ICT by students was observed. A greater variety of vocational options has been developed at Key Stage 4 to match the needs of students better such as the introduction of a BTEC in agriculture and 3D design. Transitional guidance has been improved through the introduction of more personalised support systems. In particular liaison with primary schools is better and enhanced through such events as gifted and talented days for prospective year 7 students. The school specialism in arts is making a strong contribution to the promotion of better links with feeder primary schools.

Processes and procedures for the tracking, monitoring and improvement of behaviour have greatly improved. Very good systems are in place to evaluate behaviour and the impact and consistency of application of the behaviour policy. Learning walks indicated that there is now a consistency in approach to behaviour across subject areas. The introduction of a rewards system for good behaviour has had a positive impact and is greatly valued by students. The headteacher acknowledges the need, at senior management levels, to strengthen school systems and approaches to accelerating and sustaining better outcomes for students more effectively. The appointment of a new deputy head in January is expected to strengthen senior management structures and allow the better allocation of responsibilities. Senior leaders also acknowledge the need to rethink the aspirational culture of the school both in terms of setting more challenging targets for students and in embedding a whole-school approach to improving aspirations. This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them at that point to be secure and meeting requirements.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school.  
This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010

- Increase the proportion of outstanding and good teaching, by:
  - increasing the level of challenge for the most-able
  - developing the effective use of new technologies
  - ensuring assessment is used to help students in their next steps for learning.
  
- Raise achievement and enjoyment in mathematics by ensuring developments within the leadership and management of the department and teaching and learning are firmly embedded.
  
- Embed policies and procedures, such as those for managing behaviour, so that they are applied consistently across all areas.