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Mr M Leicester
Headteacher
Calder High School, A Specialist Technology College
Brier Hey Lane
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West Yorkshire
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Dear Mr M Leicester

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Calder High School, A Specialist Technology College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please forward my thanks to the chair of governors, parents and the local authority representative for their participation during the inspection. In particular, I would be grateful if you would forward my thanks to your students for their help and cooperation during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 26 January 2012, the school was asked to address 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 is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Since May 2012 the headteacher has been absent on sick leave. From September 2012 an interim executive headteacher and interim headteacher were appointed to lead the school through the first term. An additional permanent deputy headteacher also took up post at the start of the new academic year.

The school is making inadequate progress because students continue to underperform. For a number of years students have not made the expected progress, based on their prior attainment, by the completion of Key Stage 4. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2011/12 at five A* to C including English and mathematics were significantly below those for 2010/11. The interim headteacher and senior leadership team fully recognise the urgent need to accelerate and sustain pass rates at GCSE five A* to C including English and mathematics. Tracking and monitoring systems across all subjects are not sufficiently robust. Assessment practice across the curriculum is too variable and lacks a consistency in approach and rigour. Gaps in performance between groups of students, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, are not sufficiently narrowing.

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

There is variability in the use of data at middle management and classroom level to inform on improvement strategies. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has a stronger and successful focus on developing literacy skills. However, the school acknowledges that further work is required to develop literacy, numeracy, oracy and learning skills in Years 7 and 8. In particular, the school needs to encourage more challenging approaches to learning for students and to develop their oracy skills and confidence levels. Attendance continues to improve and is currently just over 95%.

During the monitoring visit the inspector undertook a series of short visits or learning walks to a range of subjects to assess the learning and progress students made. During these learning walks the behaviour of students in class was also scrutinised. The learning walks provided evidence of lessons in which student were actively engaged in learning. In these well-paced lessons students were being stretched and challenged. However, in some sessions students were not sufficiently challenged to contribute and develop their ideas. Students, while compliant, were less engaged. School records and a local authority audit indicates that teaching and learning have improved as a result of development and intervention strategies; however, they also evidence that there remains too much satisfactory teaching in key subject areas.

Student behaviour is at least satisfactory, both in lessons and around the school. Staff have a heightened but sensitive supervisory presence during break times and the lunch hour. The school has invested in lunchtime supervisor posts and these staff can be identified with ease through 'high-visibility' jackets. Students say that they appreciate this heightened staff presence and engagement. The school behaviour code has been reviewed. Staff training has been conducted on consistency of practice in the implementation of the behaviour code. School records and discussions with staff, students and parents indicate a significant decline in racist and homophobic language and incidences of failure to adhere to school rules. No inappropriate behaviour was observed during the inspection. Students report that they feel safe and that behaviour has improved. The student council has been reconstituted and now plays a more effective role in communicating and developing the student voice. This year they have been involved in presentations to Year 7 students on behaviour and bullying and in explaining their respect campaign 'I'm me-get over it'.

Since the last inspection much work has been undertaken to improve partnerships. A Parental Engagement At Calder High (PEACH) group has been formed. During the inspection a meeting was held with representatives of this group. As a result of the PEACH initiative communications have been improved with parents and the wider community. A parental skills audit has been undertaken to establish sources of community expertise to support the developmental work of the school. Parents noted the new spirit of 'openness and responsiveness'. The local authority, since the January 2012 inspection, has played a greater role in reviewing the quality of school provision and in particular teaching and learning. The local authority action plan is appropriate and fit for purpose. However, targets for GCSE results in 2011/12 have not been met and students continue to underperform. This remains a cause of concern for the local authority.

The school is using external consultants and this is impacting on improved strategies for student behaviour and in the developing external partnerships.

The new senior leadership team have clearly identified areas for urgent improvement and have moved with alacrity to develop strategies to tackle underperformance at Key Stage 4. They have quickly established good communication with staff, students and parents and these groups express strong confidence in the current leadership. They have identified the need to improve accountability at middle management level.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Improve the behaviour of students by:
 - increasing the level of supervision in and around the school
 - improving the management of the premises including strengthening the arrangements for lunchtime by limiting movement for students and ensuring that designated areas are fully utilised
 - ensuring that all students and staff fully understand the school's expectations of students' behaviour
 - ensuring that all staff consistently apply the school's policies for managing students' behaviour
 - improving students' ability to communicate their worries or concerns quickly to staff and increasing their confidence in the staff's responses.

- Improve students' academic progress by:
 - increasing the amount of good and better teaching
 - developing more opportunities for independent learning
 - improving the use of assessment, especially in lessons, to rigorously check on students' understanding
 - increasing the pace of learning and the level of challenge for students
 - improving the impact of marking so that students are clearer about how to improve their work.

- Strengthen the impact of external partnerships on students' learning and behaviour by:
 - enabling greater involvement of parents and carers in their children's learning by creating more opportunities for parents and carers to engage in the life and work of the school
 - requesting the support, expertise and experience of the local authority in regard to the points for improvement.