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15 March 2013

Mr Tim Mitchell  
Headteacher  
Norden High School and Sports College  
Stourton Street  
Rishton  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB1 4ED

Dear Mr Mitchell

### **Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Norden High School and Sports College**

Following my visit to your school on 14 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with yourself, other senior leaders, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also reviewed a range of documentation relating to the new school and staff structures that come into place on 1 April 2013. The deputy headteacher took me on a tour of the school which enabled me to talk to students and staff, including some of the staff who are soon to take up roles in the extended senior leadership team.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, the school's staffing structure has been completely updated. The proposed new structure gives clear lines of accountability and responsibility. New middle and senior leadership roles have been developed with the intention of providing a greater focus on raising achievement and enhancing the quality of students' learning. Internal appointments have been made to a deputy head teacher role and to 12 new middle leadership posts. The school has been organised into a 'house' system which provides stronger links between pastoral care and academic guidance.

## **Main findings**

The school improvement plan has been revised and provides a clear route map for how senior leaders intend to improve the quality of teaching, students' enjoyment of learning and, as a consequence, raise achievement. Other planned actions include enhancing the skills of senior and middle leaders. This will ensure that they hold staff to account systematically for the progress their students make. The improvement plan communicates a clear intention to raise expectation and heralds a new and exciting period in the school's history. A great deal of work has already been carried out to develop a staffing structure for the school that is now fit for purpose. The headteacher has so far shouldered much of this work. There are posts for two deputy headteachers but only one has been filled. The vacancy for a senior manager places the momentum for improvement at risk.

Most improvements will start when staff are in post within the new structure from 1 April. However, the school has acted quickly where it can. A period of intensive action has been identified through the summer and the local authority is already supporting the school in observing teachers and establishing teachers' specific training needs. It is particularly pleasing to note that a review will take place so that subjects and courses offered to students can be matched more closely to their specific needs.

The improvement plan states what effect improvements are expected to have on the quality of teaching. However it does not contain measures linked to students' attainment and progress that would enable governors to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken. An external consultant has provided training to some staff on developing students' reading, writing and speaking skills. However the improvement plan does not outline a clear strategy for how the whole school can improve students' literacy and numeracy.

Middle leaders largely welcome the restructure; they are brimming with ideas about how they intend to approach their new roles and how they can raise expectations. There is renewed energy, enthusiasm and confidence now that some of the difficult decisions have been made about staffing.

School governors are keenly aware that more needs to be done to get the school well and truly on the road to becoming good. They are determined that this will happen and are already raising their game by becoming more familiar with students' progress. This is enabling them to hold senior leaders to account. The Chair of the Governing Body is highly experienced; she keeps a keen eye on school developments. Members of the governing body feel the impact of the expertise she has brought to the school. As a result, the governing body has gained a clearer sense of purpose and direction.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- tweak the school improvement plan to include targets for students' progress so that governors can evaluate the impact of actions
- identify additional capacity to cover for the vacant post at senior leader level in order to maintain the momentum of improvement
- prioritise school policies that focus on how students' literacy and numeracy skills will be developed systematically across subjects other than English and mathematics.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority is working closely with the school's senior leaders to provide a range of activities and support that is tailored closely to the school's specific needs and give teachers developmental feedback, coaching and training. The local authority has also helped the school to forge links with other schools so that senior leaders can learn from each other and share best practice. The local authority knows the school well and is very supportive of the headteacher's aims for the future of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Ashworth  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**