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Mrs K Sanderson
Headteacher
Sowerby Bridge High School
Albert Road
Sowerby Bridge
West Yorkshire
HX6 2NW

Dear Mrs Sanderson

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Sowerby Bridge High School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, and the School Improvement Partner. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school development plan and the post-Ofsted action review statement. A tour of the school was also undertaken.

Context

Since the inspection there have been no changes in staffing. One senior leader and the head of mathematics will be leaving the school at the end of this academic year and a second senior leader will be moving from full time to part time employment. The senior leadership team is currently being restructured to help the school focus more effectively on 'getting the school to good'. The governing body is at full capacity.

Main findings

Senior leaders have responded promptly to the outcomes of the inspection. They have adapted the current school improvement plan to include the areas for improvement identified at the inspection and produced a post Ofsted action review statement. There is also a separate action plan for teaching and learning and a governor development plan for diversity engagement. However, these plans follow different formats and do not identify sufficiently precise impact measures. In addition, monitoring and evaluation procedures are not identified adequately, and the plans give little indication as to precise governor involvement. Discussions were held on the importance of rationalising the different approaches and amending the revised plan to remove the deficiencies which have been identified.

The headteacher and senior leaders are clear about what needs to be done and there is an understanding of how they can use the best practice from within the school as well as from without to strengthen the quality of teaching. A bespoke training programme has been drawn up focusing on such issues as how to teach good and outstanding lessons and how to improve marking and feedback, both of which were explicitly highlighted in the areas for improvement.

Governors meet regularly to discuss the work of the school and to hold senior leaders to account. They are keen to be more effective in their work and since the inspection they have undertaken a number of training activities, including a session on understanding data and a joint governor/senior leadership development day. The chair has attended a governor training conference organised by the National College for School Leadership and the governing body has arranged for the services of a national leader of governance to help support it in its work.

Governors have established their own plan for looking at how they can ensure a much wider ethnic representation on the governing body. However, their work in monitoring and evaluating the school development plan is not sufficiently clear.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take 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:

- rationalise the various action plans and ensure that all aspects of the revised plan are closely aligned to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection
- ensure that this revised plan includes specific and discreet monitoring and evaluation procedures and precise and quantifiable impact measures
- clarify within the plan the precise role of governors in ensuring that the actions identified bring about the necessary improvements within the next two years.

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

External support

Senior leaders have identified a range of support needed to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and the impact of governors. Plans include support from outside the school as well as utilising the good practice which exists within the school. Senior leaders have also welcomed the support of the school's School Improvement Partner and a former headteacher of a highly effective neighbouring school.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector