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Mr Andrew Whitaker
Headteacher
Todmorden High School
Ewood Lane
Todmorden
West Yorkshire
OL14 7DG

Dear Mr Whitaker

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Todmorden High School, Calderdale

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, and the School Effectiveness Officer. A telephone discussion was also held with the National Leader of Education from the GORSE Academies Trust who is acting as executive headteacher. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school improvement plan. A tour of the school was also undertaken.

Context

By the end of the academic year three teachers will have left the school. The acting headteacher has been appointed as permanent headteacher with effect from 1 September 2013. The governing body has two vacancies.

Main findings

Senior leaders are resolute in their conviction to improve the school so that it is judged to be good or better when it is next inspected. Within a relatively short space of time appropriate

actions have been put in place to bring about improvement quickly and the commitment of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher has been pivotal in this work. The school improvement plan has been adapted to include recommendations of the inspection report. It focuses on key issues and sets down specific activities, how impact will be measured, the outcomes desired and the people who are taking responsibility for each issue. However, it does not include all the issues identified at the inspection. For example, the need to develop governance, a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy, and improved communication with parents are not given sufficient mention. In addition, senior leaders taking responsibility for each of the key issues, and those who will monitor and evaluate the impact of actions, have not been clearly identified and there is no reference in the plan to governor involvement. Discussions were held on the importance of amending the plan accordingly by senior leaders and governors.

Senior leaders are clear about what needs to be done and how their ambitions will be realised. There is an understanding of how they can use the best practice from within the school as well as from within the GORSE Academies Trust to strengthen the quality of teaching and the impact of leadership. Evidence from the school's monitoring procedures since the inspection indicates that actions taken are starting to have the desired impact. Underperformance is being tackled and staff are clear of what is expected of them. The use of the school's 'Minimum Classroom Expectations' by all teachers in all lessons, for example, is beginning to have a positive impact on both teaching and learning. In addition, the creation of a 'Communication Protocol' to cover all communication to and from parents provides a clear signal of the intention to improve the school's engagement with parents and carers and the local community.

Governors have moved quickly to appoint a permanent headteacher. They are keen to be more effective in their work and since the inspection they have undertaken a number of training activities, including a whole governing body session on understanding data and individual governor attendance at specific training events according to need. Through the GORSE Academies Trust, the governing body has arranged the services of a National Leader of Governance to help support it in its work and to undertake this term a review of the effectiveness of the governing body. Governors have revised the committee structure and created a series of working groups which is helping them to focus more effectively on holding senior leaders to account. Governors and senior leaders remain committed to improving the condition of the school site and the fabric of the buildings. However, the work of governors in monitoring and evaluating the school improvement plan, which includes some but not all actions emanating from the inspection, is not sufficiently clear.

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:

- ensure that all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection are reflected within the school improvement plan
- identify specific and discreet monitoring and evaluation procedures for each aspect of the plan
- 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

The GORSE Academies Trust is providing appropriate support and guidance for the school in its quest for rapid and sustained improvement. Through the developing strategic partnership between the school and the trust, senior leaders have acted quickly to tackle the recommendations identified in the inspection report. Plans involve using a careful mix of support from outside the school alongside some of the good practice which exists within the school. Leaders and teachers from Todmorden High School, for example, have already started to work with colleagues at both The Farnley and the Morley Academies. Senior leaders have also welcomed the support of the local authority and their designated School Effectiveness Officer.

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