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Dr K O'Hagan
Headteacher
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Dear Dr O'Hagan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Royton and Crompton School, Oldham

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, to report 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors have started to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Leaders should take further action to:

- Amend the improvement plan to make clear which people are monitoring the impact of the actions and which people are evaluating the impact of the actions.
- Within the plan, amend the criteria used to assess whether the actions have been successful so that they are easy to measure and are more precise.
- Amend the improvement plan to get to the heart of which aspects of teaching and learning need to be improved in each subject.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and two senior leaders; three members of the governing body; and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection.

Main findings

Senior leaders began work, immediately after the inspection and before the report was published, working on the key areas identified by the inspection team and creating a plan for improvement. All of the key issues are included in the plan but some parts of the text of the report aren't covered in depth such as refining teachers' questioning skills. There is a very sharp focus, in the plan, on the leadership of teaching through frequent monitoring of lessons, making better use of data and coaching teachers to improve their practice. However, the plan lacks precision about what aspects of teaching need to be improved. It makes clear who is leading each action but it is unclear which people are monitoring the actions and which are evaluating whether they have been successful. It would be difficult to assess whether the actions to improve the school have been successful because the measures are too vague.

Prior to this year, standards had been falling steadily with a significant dip in 2012. The inspection report identified the likelihood that standards would rise in 2013 and this was certainly the case. For example, students' attainment in English GCSE rose significantly to be above average when compared with other Oldham schools with over 70% of students attaining a C grade or above. Similarly, attainment rose in most subjects, reversing the declining trend. There is still some work to do however to make sure the gap between boys' and girls' attainment closes quickly and standards in other subjects such as geography, art and design and physical education rise more quickly. Similarly, there is still too big a gap between students who are supported by the pupil premium (money from the government to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority, and those with parents and carers in the armed forces) and those who are not. The school should now focus on closing the gap quickly between groups of students.

Work started quickly on eradicating any inadequate teaching across the school. Teachers were coached effectively by middle leaders in how to improve lessons and as a result by the end of the summer, according to the school's monitoring, their teaching was better and no teaching was inadequate. Teachers were paired with colleagues who they were happy to work with to develop key parts of their teaching. This approach identified and removed any barriers to teachers' improvement and has started to pay dividends with teachers helping each other to improve.

The school has set up a new marking policy and according to the school's monitoring; it has begun to be implemented by all staff. Students now have clear targets from the start of Year 7. Expectations are higher, for example, all pupils coming into school at Level 5 are challenged to attain a minimum of a grade A in their GCSEs. Students in the latest survey indicated a high level of agreement with the statement 'we are encouraged and supported more to make progress in

learning'. There is still some work to do however to increase the impact of marking on students' knowledge of what exactly they need to do to improve their work in each subject.

'Belief, leadership, learning' is the focus of the learning culture newly developed by senior leaders. The culture aims to make students more confident, more involved in their learning and leading their own development. The school's monitoring suggests this approach has started to have an impact with students being less reliant on the teacher and taking on learning themselves. In the pupil survey, a greater proportion of students agreed they are encouraged to work more independently and take more responsibility.

The different layers of leadership have been restructured to make sure senior leaders provide more support and challenge to subject departments and to make sure there is a better focus on improving teaching. There is for example, greater coaching from senior leaders to support middle leaders in their leadership roles. There have also been some changes to the leadership of departments. The impact of these changes has already started to be seen, according to the school's monitoring, on improved teaching and better progress made by students.

In a relatively short space of time, governors have taken action to improve their support and challenge to the school. They have, for example, established systems to make sure all governors know important information about standards and teaching instead of just a few governors. They have appointed a new governor with recent experience of headship to provide additional challenge to the governing body. Much of the time since the inspection has been spent on appointing the headteacher. Further developments are increasing governors' ability to support and challenge the school such as extending their knowledge of school data, and visiting lessons. A key improvement from the inspection was to establish a link between the performance of a teacher and pay. The system is now in place and as a result there is a much clearer link between teachers' performance, accountability and their pay. Governors have not yet started on an external review but they have considered different options and hope to have started a review in the autumn term.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority support for the school has been limited and so has had little direct impact. The authority has linked with an external partner to review the school's work and challenge leaders to improve but the support was limited because it did not dig deep enough to find out directly the quality and impact of teaching. The external partner spent too much time talking with senior leaders rather than providing clear evaluation about the impact of teaching on learning. However, the

external consultant did make links with a successful English subject leader which has helped the school to improve its English results significantly.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector