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Mrs Kathryn Barton
Headteacher
Up Holland High School
Sandbrook Road
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Dear Mrs Barton

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Up Holland High School

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the school's recently appointed heads of English and mathematics. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. Her Majesty's Inspector visited most classrooms accompanied by the headteacher and had brief conversations with students, including the school's head boy.

Context

Subject leaders for English and mathematics have been appointed. One governor has resigned and three parent governors have been appointed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and governors have responded appropriately to the inspection. They have built on previous actions and plans and increased the pace of improvement since the inspection. The restructuring of the senior leadership team at the start of this school year means that leaders' roles and responsibilities are clear and match the key improvement areas. Lines of accountability are clear.

While the school's improvement plan provides a detailed framework for the development of the school and is starting to result in improvement, it lacks precision about the timing of the many actions. This makes it harder to ensure that actions happen quickly enough in order to raise achievement at a faster pace. The lack of precision also makes it less certain that the milestones for improvements in achievement and teaching will be met. The layout of the plan does not lend itself to tracking its implementation and effectiveness. The plan to improve mathematics is sufficiently challenging and links increased achievement to improved teaching. However, GCSE results in English fell in 2013 and the consequent need to take urgent action to improve achievement in English has not been given enough prominence in the plan. Initial monitoring of the plan has not established clear enough expectations of the progress students need to make in Year 10 in English and mathematics.

Subject leadership has been reinforced by the new appointments for English and mathematics. The experience of the acting leaders of these subjects will continue to be used. The new leaders have already been included in the early stages of a systematic training programme to improve the quality of middle leadership.

Governors are now providing more robust support and challenge to the school. New governors understand the school better because the headteacher has improved their induction. Governors are prepared to ask difficult questions of each other and the school and have done so since the inspection. Governors understand the urgency of tackling the school's weaknesses. They are working, in pairs, to hold senior leaders to account in relation to each area of the school improvement plan. The governors' 'Standards and Effectiveness Committee' (which has been monitoring the school's progress since the inspection) is at an early stage of its work. It has completed a very full review of the actions taken so far but its analysis of impact has not been detailed. An external review of the governance has started.

The local authority has provided strong support to the school in the past. This has been increased in response to the inspection. The local authority has brokered a link with a National Leader of Education (NLE). This includes direct support for the headteacher and opportunities for other members of staff to observe and learn from practice in the NLE's outstanding school. This work is still at an early stage but is already building the confidence of those involved. The local authority has developed a programme to improve teaching and learning involving consultants for English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. This includes training on the specific areas identified in the inspection. Further support is provided by the consultants for teaching and learning, and behaviour and attendance.

The lead advisor has supported senior and middle leaders in observing lessons taught by all teachers. This support has provided a full and robust survey of the quality of teaching. The joint observations improved the evaluation skills and the accuracy of the senior and middle leaders' judgements. Where the teaching observed was not judged good or better, teachers have been set challenging short-term targets to address weaker aspects and have been supported to improve. Further observations have indicated that teaching is improving.

The local authority's statement of action is closely linked to the school improvement plan and makes clear commitments to providing support to address the school's weaker areas. The work of the NLE and the consultants from the local authority is well planned and has included the school leaders involved. This is helping to ensure it meets the needs of the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector