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12 September 2014

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 to Norden High School and Sports College, Lancashire**

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- continue building on the good initiatives to improve teaching and learning already being undertaken by the school
- strengthen the school improvement plan to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of actions takes place and the outcomes are appropriately recorded.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was

evaluated and other relevant documentation such as the 'Teaching over Time' performance management portfolios.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection the school has appointed a new business manager, a teaching assistant and a parent governor. The school has also adjusted the staffing structure at middle leadership level to match the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. For example, by appointing lead learners for reading and writing.

## **Main findings**

The updated school improvement plan matches well the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. However, some adjustment to the plan is recommended to ensure that success criteria are clear, including detailed milestones to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

Early analysis of the summer 2014 examination results indicate a modest rise in attainment and some closing of attainment gaps between groups but the significance of this will not be evident until fully validated attainment and progress data are available.

Senior leaders and governors display a good capacity to affect positive changes in the school. You and the governors understand well what needs to be done to improve outcomes and are prepared to take difficult decisions. Leaders and managers have a sense of urgency but are also realistic about how much can be achieved with limited resources. To this end you have prioritised actions well and are making the most of the external support available.

Senior leaders with responsibility for data and achievement and for teaching and learning have been working together very closely to improve outcomes across the school, and enhance the accountability of middle leaders. Subject leaders are now more aware of their responsibility to ensure good teaching and learning in their departments and the need for improved outcomes from students. Teachers have benefitted from in-service training that has targeted issues such as: data analysis and how to use it to inform planning and intervention; marking and effective feedback; and writing and presentation.

Since the last inspection, a range of activities have been brokered by the local authority to help senior and middle leaders improve their practice. This has included subject reviews of modern foreign languages, mathematics, and science; support for middle leaders to produce subject self-evaluations; subject lead support in computing and mathematics; as well as advice on attendance, behaviour for learning, budgeting, and conducting joint lesson observations.

Marking and feedback has been a key focus for improvement and the students I met approve of the changes. They say that marking is now more frequent and they enjoy responding to the teachers' questions about how they can improve further. The students remarked that they are proud to wear the new uniform which is 'much smarter' and 'makes you feel better about yourself' and they also have greater pride in their work now that teachers have higher expectations of their presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar. The students spoke positively about the changes to the times of the day. They said that the day seemed to go more quickly; they were able to learn more effectively at the start and end of the day; and that lessons were now more engaging. When asked what they would like to see improved, the students commented that they sometimes had too many supply teachers and that they would like to see more small, achievable rewards for good work.

Governance is strong. The governing body have considerable expertise and are confident in their ability to hold senior leaders to account. Plans are in place for an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium.

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 is helping the school to improve by brokering a good range of support. This includes support from consultants and advisers for mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, teaching and learning, pupil premium, and behaviour and attendance. Plans are in place to give teachers a better understanding of what constitutes good and outstanding practice through the brokering of visits to good and outstanding schools within and beyond the local authority.

You have already attended Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminar with a member of the senior leadership team and the Chair of Governors which I hope you found to be useful. I will let you know of future conferences, seminars and events such as the 'Through the lens of inspection' seminar.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**