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Mr S Curran
Headteacher
Tong High School
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Dear Mr Curran

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Tong High School

Following my visit to your school on 21 June 2016, 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 inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in April 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2015.

- Urgently raise students' achievement further across all subjects, particularly in English and mathematics and for disadvantaged students, those with special educational needs and disabilities, through ensuring teaching is at least good by:
 - making sure all staff expect students to take more responsibility for their own learning in lessons and through homework activities
 - ensuring teachers adjust activities planned in lessons in order to best meet the learning needs of individual students
 - giving students the opportunity to respond to teachers' feedback in a meaningful way to help them gain a deeper understanding of key concepts and skills
 - providing students with the opportunity to apply their literacy and mathematics skills in a wider context across the curriculum and through other opportunities provided by the school
 - sharing more effectively the good practice in teaching that exists across the school.

- Further improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including governors, by:
 - ensuring that, at all levels and in every area of the school's work, a strong focus on students' learning and progress is maintained, particularly for students with lower starting points
 - providing appropriate developmental support and training for the small number of middle leaders to help them undertake their roles
 - helping middle leaders to swiftly identify emerging weaknesses and inconsistencies in their area of responsibility and take effective action to address these
 - ensuring assessment processes are robust and accurately reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding gained by students
 - continuing the work to secure further improvements in attendance
 - reviewing the way sixth-form achievement can be improved, especially for those students who are repeating courses.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21 June 2016

Evidence

During this inspection I met with the headteacher, senior leaders and governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with representatives from the local authority and Tauheedul Education Trust. Short visits were made to lessons in several departments. Pupils' work was scrutinised in lessons, and discussions were held with them informally and in a formal meeting. I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's revised improvement plan, assessment, behaviour and attendance information, records of the quality of teaching and external reports.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has had considerable staffing changes particularly at senior leadership level. Two deputy headteachers are absent long term due to ill health. Two assistant headteachers and three teachers left the school at Easter. A national leader of education who had been providing support to the headteacher during the Spring term also left at Easter. Since then, the director of academy improvement for Tauheedul Education Trust has worked full time at the school to provide support to the leadership team and teaching staff. One teacher has also joined the school. The school is due to close shortly and open as an academy sponsored by the Tauheedul Education Trust.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and governors are working closely with external support to plug the gaps in leadership following the departure of key staff. The pace of work to secure improvement has begun to accelerate in response to revised leadership responsibilities and a coherent programme of training and support for senior and middle leaders. Attention has switched from monitoring data to focus much more firmly on checking the quality and impact of work taking place in classrooms. Better quality assurance and feedback to teachers is starting to take effect. Stronger practice is being shared more systematically across the school to tackle those aspects in teaching that are not yet good.

The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers' expectations of pupils are rising, and this is demonstrated in tasks that are better adapted to meet pupils' learning needs. However, this is not yet precise enough to enable the most and least able to learn well. For the most part pupils are attentive and focused in lessons. They say, 'teachers are getting stricter'. However, there is a lack of consistency in the application of the school's non-negotiable approach to rewarding good work and effort and in applying sanctions when behaviour and punctuality fall below high expectations.

Weaknesses in school assessment systems and in the accuracy and reliability of data are starting to be tackled with the support of English and mathematics specialists provided through the trust. Assessments are scrutinised in greater depth and checks on learning and of pupils' books are starting to provide much greater security to the school's performance information at key stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, the improvements to teaching have yet to have a demonstrable impact on achievement. Leaders predict modest improvements in results in examinations compared to previous years.

Leaders and governors are benefiting from the detailed audit of the school's performance provided by external support. They have quickly implemented a new, and sharply focused, improvement plan. Priorities are keenly focused and the plan fully embraces the areas for improvement identified in the April 2015 inspection. The plan also sensibly pre-empts, and anticipates action, to revise staffing and deal with financial constraints due to the fall in school numbers which is forecast for September 2016 onwards.

Governors receive timely and detailed information from school leaders and as a result are able to make some key decisions. They have approved changes to the curriculum and a higher level of aspiration for pupils is now evident in the targets and outcomes that leaders and governors have set for September 2016 onwards. An external review of governance has begun but has yet to be completed. Arrangements for the school to join the Tauheedul Education Trust are well advanced and the school has begun to adopt some trust practice and systems.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Lessons are better planned to enable pupils to learn well. Pupils say that they are clearer about what is expected of them. They now expect to be given short tasks to complete on arrival to lessons and know that they need to work quickly. As a result, the vast majority of pupils settle to work very quickly. Over the last two terms, their books reflect a productive and positive approach to learning and demonstrate a more systematic focus to develop their writing and language skills.
- Effective teachers from other subjects are being re-trained and used well to strengthen and improve the quality of teaching in mathematics and science. This is bringing benefits to pupils' learning. Their clear explanations and enthusiasm for mathematics and science are helping to interest and excite pupils. Pupils' thoughtful responses to questions, work rate, attendance and punctuality to lessons are increasing in some classes.
- Greater emphasis on literacy and better quality and quantity in writing is evident across the curriculum. For example, teachers are using a range of methods well to support pupils in structuring their writing in science, history and religious education. Pupils are participating more in lessons and are being encouraged to do so by teachers' increasingly effective use of questioning.

This is enabling pupils to explain their ideas and to understand and use subject-specific language and terms more precisely.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Assessment and the use of performance information, especially at key stage 3, is not used well enough to challenge the most able pupils.
- Some pupils are concerned that verbal bullying is not dealt with swiftly and effectively so that issues do not persist.
- School attendance remains below the national level and remains a significant barrier to achievement in Year 11.
- The number of pupils whose behaviour is a concern is not reducing and the pattern of behavioural incidents has continued to fluctuate over the last two terms. The work by pastoral staff to support pupils in meeting their responsibilities and in helping them to manage their behaviour has had too little impact.

External support

Support provided by Tauheedul Education Trust is sharply focused, effective and well integrated into the local authority's statement of action for the school. A thorough audit of the school's needs has led to a well-planned programme of training. The support provided to the headteacher and senior leaders is considerable. Senior and middle leaders are developing more consistency in reviewing the quality and in assuring consistency to the school's work. This is already helping to secure improvements in teaching, and has helped to develop suitable improvement planning focused on the things the school needs to do better. The local authority is keeping a close eye on the school's progress and welcomes the very recent actions to move the school forward. The school's capacity to secure significant improvement in pupils' achievement and attendance without the current high level of external support remains a concern to the local authority.