



27 January 2006

Ms J Gabler  
Principal  
Ladybridge High School  
New York  
Junction Road  
Deane  
Bolton  
BL3 4NG

Dear Ms Gabler

## **COLLABORATIVE RESTART: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LADYBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with John Ashton AI and Ross Parker AI to your school on 25 and 26 January 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2004.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work including 31 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, principal, senior and middle managers, groups of pupils, the chair and vice-chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### **Context**

The number of pupils in the school has continued to grow, having increased by about 15% in the last six months. Much of this intake has been into existing year groups, particularly Year 9, but there are also indications that an increased number will be admitted to Year 7 in 2006. There has also been an increase in the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, which is

now high at nearly 35%. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English has also risen steadily and is now 25%. The school is continuing to develop its Sports College status, awarded in September 2005, especially through work with other schools. It was awarded international school status in September 2005.

## **Achievement and standards**

An analysis of pupils' achievement in the school is presently of less validity than usual because the school is little more than a year old; in this time, there has been a high level of pupil and teacher mobility. In particular, there has been a sizable movement of pupils into the school from other schools in the district and also from overseas; this has had an inevitable impact on overall standards. Pupils' progress between the ages of 11 and 14, as measured in 2005 national tests, was very low in comparison to national expectations. It was similarly weak in English, mathematics and science. As a result, the overall performance was inadequate and standards were also too low. However, the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and of the more able pupils was satisfactory. More able pupils made the best progress in mathematics.

The progress of pupils between the ages of 11 and 16, who had less than a year of the new school before taking their exams, was also very low. Progress in English was amongst the lowest in the country. The overall progress for the school was heavily influenced by a significant number of pupils who gained no exam passes at all, amounting to 8% compared to a national figure of less than 1%; most of these were pupils who attended school very little during Year 11. However, other individuals made good progress, including a number of boys. The weakest progress was made by pupils on the School Action stage of the school's register of pupils with LDD and by girls of average ability. However there was positive progress by other pupils with language and learning difficulties. Overall, standards at age 16 were therefore significantly below the national figures in all key respects, although standards were close to, or above, the national figures in a small number of subjects including art, drama and design technology. The proportion of pupils gaining five higher grade passes also rose compared to the predecessor school.

Evidence from lessons indicates that progress is improving, though it is not always sufficient to overcome legacies of weak progress in the past. Pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed and it was good or better in just under half, which was less than the proportion of good teaching. Progress is held back by such factors as pupils' occasional passivity, with class oral work still tending to depend on the efforts of a minority of pupils in older classes. They do not always ask when they need help. On occasions, some pupils make too little progress because they are unfamiliar with key terms being used.

## **Personal development and well-being**

Attendance has improved over the past two years from around 86% to an average of 92%, due in large measure to the effective work of people like the home school liaison officer and to better use of the new electronic methods of recording attendance. Attendance remains higher overall at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4.

Punctuality has also improved. The home school liaison officer is an effective presence as the pupils approach the school each morning. The school's definition of late is if a pupil is not present by the end of the five minute registration at the beginning of the day, in other words late for the first lesson. The school reports a reduction from 4.2% lateness in the autumn term 2004 to 3.4 % for the autumn term 2005.

Behaviour remains good in class and around the school between lessons and in areas such as the dining room. No examples of unsatisfactory behaviour were seen during the visit. This good behaviour is allowing teachers to teach and other pupils to learn without distractions. One result of this is an increase in the proportion of good lessons. However exclusion rates, though not excessively high and falling each term, are still well above national rates. This reflects the school's determination to take a firm line on what is acceptable behaviour and upon standard of dress. The main reasons for exclusions are assault, foul language and verbal abuse. Racist behaviour is rare. Relationships between the various groups in school are generally good.

Pupils support the firm line taken by senior staff in setting and maintaining higher standards of behaviour. An emotionally intelligent approach is a strong feature of the school's attitude to staff and pupil relationships. For instance, looking past the symptoms of unsatisfactory behaviour by focusing on its causes is a common and effective approach in the school.

## **Quality of provision**

The school has given the highest priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning, and the systems they have set in place have had significant impact. Teaching was outstanding in two lessons, and good in a further 16. It was satisfactory in all of the 31 lessons seen. This reflects the school's own accurate analysis of the current quality of teaching and learning.

There has been a sharp focus on both developing the range of teaching approaches, and on monitoring the effectiveness of this development work. Senior managers have succeeded in creating a culture where all of the teaching staff expect to improve their practice continuously. They have also developed a team of lead practitioners who are able to coach their colleagues

and to co-ordinate working parties where a larger number of staff contribute to developments.

Pupils are clear that learning is now more enjoyable and they are conscious that teachers are planning a wider variety of activities to appeal to a greater range of interests. This has also led to improved relationships within classrooms. There is a greater pace of learning in lessons as teachers can demand more from pupils and manage transitions between different activities quickly. Teachers make good use of digital projectors to enliven lessons and to bring concepts to life through relevant use of the internet. There are good opportunities for group work, where pupils enjoy the interaction and collaborate well. There are still too few opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning by expressing their understanding in their own words – orally or in writing.

Lessons have also become more challenging for the majority of pupils. A standard lesson planning format has been established, and this is developing teachers' awareness of the different activities they need to provide to challenge pupils of different abilities. Teachers and support staff anticipate the extra help that pupils with LDD may need. They give good support to enable these pupils to learn as independently as they can. Further work remains to be done in this area, particularly to ensure that the highest attainers in each group are fully stretched in every lesson. Whilst some teachers are beginning to set more demanding written tasks, it is rarer for them to use questioning to test and extend higher levels of thinking.

Good progress has been made in developing a consistent approach to marking pupils' work. This now enables pupils to see what they need to do to improve their written work to the next grade or level. Pupils understand what levels they should be aiming for and get regular feedback on the level they are currently reaching. They are less sure about how to achieve their target grade in their tasks. The improved assessment means that teachers are in a better position to plan to meet everyone's current needs. In the longer term this is working well, but there is still too little adjustment from lesson to lesson to react to individuals who have made more or less progress than was expected.

Care, guidance and support are strong, via the house system and vertical tutor groups. Child Protection arrangements are robust and regularly reviewed. Looked after children are identified and have a senior member of staff responsible for their welfare and personal education plans. Pupils are well supported as they transfer from primary school, especially the group of vulnerable and lower attaining pupils who are well taught, mainly by one teacher. The effective coordination of support for pupils with learning difficulties is helped by a good number of effectively deployed learning support assistants. The planning by class teachers for the effective use of these assistants is not always as clear as it could be. Support for pupils for

whom English is an additional language (EAL) is an increasing strength of the school. Pupils with EAL who are also at an early stage of acquiring competence in English are arriving in increasing numbers. Thirty five such pupils have joined the school since September. A good mixture of immersion in class with some support, and more structured small group and individual support in the EAL base room is used. The Saturn room is having a significant impact on re-integrating troubled youngsters and is reducing exclusion figures for this group.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2005:

- increase the number of lessons where teaching is good or better: good progress
- ensure that work is well matched to the needs of the pupils: good progress
- ensure that lesson plans provide details about the role of learning support staff: satisfactory progress.

### **Leadership and management**

The impact of the leadership and management on school improvement has been good. The leadership of the school continues to depend on a combination of staff based entirely at this school and others shared with the partner school. The time commitment of the executive principal has been reduced in line with the school's growing self-confidence. The school's leadership has continued to place great emphasis on improving teaching and learning. A high priority is being given to professional development, some of which is successfully building upon strengths already identified at the school. This is helping to give staff confidence about their capacity to maintain improvement. The senior team and the principal have additional support from staff deployed from the partner school, such as in the role of data analysis and timetable preparation. As a team, they are developing a coherent approach to key aspects of school management. They have succeeded in making clear expectations about what constitutes good teaching, good planning and consistent behaviour management.

There are robust systems for monitoring the quality of the school's daily work and developing good practice in the evaluation of impact. This has been invaluable at a time when many staff are new to the school; approximately a fifth of the teaching staff are newly qualified or as yet unqualified. A careful analysis of the quality of teaching is maintained. This usefully helps to identify areas of strength and comparative weakness. There is a similar analysis of pupils' books and how they have been marked. The school's analysis of exam

and test data is of a high quality, linking well into issues for celebration or improvement. Therefore the school has a good understanding of its own strengths and areas for further development. There remains the scope for further work in developing an evaluation of senior leadership roles.

There are good links between the governing body and school staff. Standards, exclusions and attendance are monitored regularly, although reports on the quality of teaching feature less often. The school budget resulted in a larger than anticipated deficit in 2004-5, of about £500,000. There has also been the additional pressure of providing for many new entrants to the school, of whom a substantial proportion required extra support in learning English. It is now anticipated that increasing pupil numbers will help to moderate the impact of the deficit and a recovery plan has been established.

### Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2005:

- improve the accuracy of the school's judgments of teaching – good progress.

### **External support**

The most significant support for the school continues to come from its links through the Brook Learning Partnership and the Bolton West cluster of schools. The appointment of lead learning advocates by the cluster has added a valuable resource for professional development. There has been effective support from the local authority's adviser and the continuity of this over the period of the closure and restart has been helpful. Appropriate support is provided by LA consultants in areas such as science and English; this is linked to broad outcomes such as improved standards, but is mostly too general to be an effective tool for accountability. However, specific quantified outcomes have been supplied for the behaviour and attendance support.

### **Main Judgements**

The school's overall progress – good.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Continue to work to increase the progress being made by all pupils.
- Ensure that work is always well matched to pupils' needs, especially in the areas of basic literacy and appropriate challenge for more able pupils.
- Develop opportunities for pupils to talk or write more extensively in their own words in order to explore and extend their understanding in all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Gray  
**H M Inspector**