

16 Oct 2007

Mr Tony Hill
Headteacher
Walton-le-Dale High School
Brindle Road
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Dear Mr Hill

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also thank the students I spoke to both in and out of lessons. They were very polite and spoke to me with confidence.

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

As a result of the inspection on 7–8 March 2007, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 4, with a focus on mathematics and English.
- Improve the attendance of all learners, particularly girls in Years 10 and 11.
- Make sure that all teaching and learning is consistently good or better.
- Ensure that all senior and middle leaders are focused on coherent improvement strategies which are well co-ordinated and which lead to rapid improvement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Standards are rising overall. The trend of achievement is upwards in most subjects at Key Stage 4. The GCSE examination results in summer 2007 showed significant improvements in the percentages of pupils gaining five A* to C and five A* to G grades. Mathematics results were particularly strong. Where achievement has not improved as quickly as it should, the school understands the issues and has appropriate strategies to address the problems. Improvements to the way leaders

and managers monitor and evaluate the work of the school mean that they are now quick to adapt when change is needed. Changes to staffing and improvements to teaching and learning are beginning to have a longer-term impact on raising standards. The school is aware of inconsistencies in the way a minority of teachers responds to increased expectations about the quality of their teaching and its impact on students' learning. Effective systems provide the challenge and the support these teachers need.

The GCSE results in summer 2007 showed a significant discrepancy in achievement between students' good results in English literature and weaker results in English language. The percentage of students who achieved five A* to C grades increased rapidly from 34% in 2006 to 59% in 2007. However, the percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and Maths GCSE was only 22%. These discrepancies were due to staffing difficulties in English leading up to the examinations and a lack of whole-school emphasis on literacy. Better use of data on pupils' prior attainment and information from tracking their progress is improving the focus on achievement for students and teachers. However, it is not consistently used to inform teachers' planning so that work can be precisely matched to students' needs. The higher attaining students are not yet sufficiently challenged.

The school uses appropriate strategies to improve attendance. However support from the local authority has been too inconsistent to help improve the attendance of the most persistent offenders. Attendance is rising slowly but students are not consulted sufficiently to enable the school to understand the reasons for poor attendance. Although trends are analysed, the school is not sufficiently proactive in developing a wider range of strategies to encourage students to attend and to engage them more positively with rewards. Curriculum changes are designed to motivate students better. The school's performing arts specialist status is enriching the curriculum and there are more opportunities for work-related learning but more needs to be done to motivate girls, whose attendance and achievement are below that for boys overall.

Teaching and learning are more consistently good or better than they were at the time of the last inspection. This has been achieved because the quality of teaching and learning is closely monitored and leaders have a secure understanding of what constitutes good practice. In addition, staffing difficulties are being gradually resolved. The policy on teaching and learning and the focus on innovative themes for lesson planning each week are very effective. Teachers receive good feedback when they are observed or when their planning and students' work are scrutinised. There are good opportunities to share best practice through staff meetings, coaching, in-service training, the use of the local authority's consultants and performance management systems. Where teaching and learning are less strong this is due to inconsistencies in the way that teachers manage behaviour, share learning objectives with students, use tracking information to plan lessons and make students aware of the next steps in their learning.

The school now has a culture of improvement. This is being effectively disseminated through the vision of the headteacher and his senior leadership team. The school has been awarded Investor in People status for the quality of its leadership and

management. Improvement planning is well co-ordinated. Senior leaders are implementing good strategies and middle managers understand how they need to work with their staff to ensure that improvements are consistently embedded in practice. Governors have placed a suitable focus on marketing the school and enhancing recruitment strategies. Governors prioritise well but are not always actively involved in evaluating the impact of developments. Most teachers are increasingly enthusiastic about new ways of working. Opportunities for professional development and challenges to underachievement are helping to ensure that improvement is more consistently rapid. The local authority provides good support at all levels within the school. In the minority of areas of the school where improvement is less rapid, working systems are insufficiently focused on achievement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector