

9 May 2008

Mr M Braidley
The Headteacher
Woodhey High School
Bolton Road West
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Bury
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Dear Mr Braidley

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 8 May 2008. I appreciate the time you gave to our phone discussions and the information you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my particular thanks to the chair of governors for giving her time to meet with me and to the staff and students.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 3 and 4 October 2007, the school was asked to:

- ensure the vision for further improvement across the school is clearer, more strategic and better focused on raising the achievement of all students
- make sure the plans to improve the monitoring of the school's work are implemented systematically and effectively
- establish a clear and shared understanding of the most effective ways of promoting students' learning
- develop greater consistency in the effectiveness of middle management across the school
- address the continued failure to meet statutory requirements for religious education at Key Stage 4.

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

Standards are consistently above, and in some cases, well above average at both key stages. However, pupils' average point score has been below and well below average since 2005, representing inadequate achievement. The school has recognised this problem and is tackling the issue with vigour. Targets are being set at a more challenging level. A new electronic monitoring system has been introduced, providing

a consistent whole-school method for tracking pupils' progress against their targets. Whilst still in development, underachieving pupils are being identified, supported and challenged. A thorough and coherent approach has been adopted, the main thrust of which is focused on Year 11 where approximately 55 pupils are receiving varying levels of support to help them reach their potential. Current school data indicate that the school is now on track to meet its Key Stage 4 targets. The introduction of adult literacy and numeracy tests is contributing to this while extending opportunities for a significant number of pupils to move to the next stage of their education with an additional qualification. In addition, the school is giving careful consideration to the benefits of extending opportunities for pupils to enter GCSE examinations earlier than is customary.

The school has recognised that some elements of underachievement are a consequence of curriculum choices at Key Stage 4. Planning is underway to introduce a broader range of courses to better suit pupils' needs and interests, including vocational options and some that lead to dual awards. Following the inspection, rapid changes were made to the Year 10 curriculum to ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to religious education. Beginning in Year 10, pupils now follow a GCSE short course. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has also been improved and the qualifications offered are better matched to pupils' needs and preferences.

Led by the clear vision of the headteacher and the determination of the governing body, there is a commitment amongst all staff to invest in whole-school improvement. Since the inspection, school improvement planning is more detailed and focused on achievement, teaching and learning. Progress toward the plan is reviewed rigorously on a monthly basis by the newly established governors' monitoring sub-committee. The school is successfully using a complete rewrite of its self-evaluation form (SEF) as the mechanism for reviewing its provision in its entirety. Its approach has altered markedly from descriptive to sharply evaluative, demonstrating clearly its determination to establish priorities for improvement on a firm base. Expectations are rising rapidly. The senior leadership team, governors and middle leaders have worked hard to bring consistency and effectiveness to the monitoring of the school's work. A clear cycle for rigorous monitoring and evaluation has been established in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. An accelerated schedule of paired lesson observations has helped to identify common themes for development in teaching and learning. Lesson observation and planning pro formas have been introduced to aid consistency.

To help establish a clear and shared understanding of effective teaching and learning, good use has been made of whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, including the weekly 'after school hour' (ASH) sessions. Working parties have been established to explore specific aspects of teaching and learning. Lessons observed during the visit were well planned and engaging, and learning outcomes were shared with pupils.

The introduction of 'coaching' of middle leaders by the senior team is viewed very positively by heads of department. This intervention has helped address specific

areas of weakness and ensures robust accountability. Subject leaders are more involved in the use of tracking systems and, as a result, are using data more effectively. The management of new tracking systems has proved challenging to some middle leaders and some teachers are still at the very early stages of learning how to access and interpret the data effectively.

The school has built on and shared good practice where it existed. The work of the English department in the monitoring of homework and the science department's work scrutiny plan are good examples of this. The specialist science college has been involved in the formulation of the updated SEF and specialist college funding has been drawn on to utilise the teaching and learning expertise of an advanced skills teacher.

The local authority has fulfilled its commitments to the school, for example, through subject specific consultations and by funding extra support from the school improvement partner, thus ensuring the school has a significant level of challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Palmer".

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector