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Ms Gill Shirt
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Shirt

Short inspection of Todmorden High School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2018 with Catherine Garrett, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been a number of changes at Todmorden High School since the previous inspection in March 2015. A new chair of governors was appointed in September 2016 and you took up the post of headteacher in September 2017. The sixth form closed in September 2018. The school is now recruiting a considerably higher number of pupils into Year 7, which is almost twice the size of the current Year 11. At the same time, you, supported by governors, have tackled a substantial financial deficit and restructured the senior leadership team.

You and other leaders, including governors, are determined to provide the best possible education you can for your pupils. You have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. New appointments to the senior leadership team have enabled you to start addressing some of the weaknesses that have been apparent in recent years. These include disappointing outcomes in mathematics, a very high rate of fixed-term exclusions and variable standards of teaching in several subjects. Inspectors saw evidence that your actions are starting to have a positive effect, but they are still in the early stages of development.

New appointments, including new senior leaders, are starting to make a positive difference in a number of areas that have been weaknesses before. A new attendance officer has helped to reduce pupil absence and there are early signs that

the previously high rate of fixed-term exclusions is reducing, with a much lower rate since the start of this term compared to the same period last year. New assistant headteachers have identified specific weaknesses in leadership and teaching and are taking robust action to raise standards. For example, pupils are now starting to tackle more problem-solving activities in mathematics lessons and teachers are using better assessment strategies to identify gaps in knowledge. It will take time before the impact of these improvements can be properly measured, but the early signs are promising.

You have decided to change your pupil premium spending plan because previous versions have not made enough difference to pupils' progress and behaviour. It is important that leaders and governors measure the difference your plans have on the attendance, progress and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils in the future.

The provisional measures for the progress pupils made in their key stage 4 examination courses indicate a decline in performance in 2018. This follows an overall decline in progress measures in 2017. You correctly identified that pupils have not made sufficient progress over time in mathematics, science and history.

In part, the decline in outcomes is because the curriculum did not fully match pupils' abilities or aspirations, but it is also because of the variable quality in teaching across subjects and years. Inspectors noted some improvements during the inspection, although there is still a significant level of variability in quality. When teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, learners respond well and make good progress. Conversely, there are still a number of examples where teachers do not set challenging enough tasks, especially for the most able pupils, nor insist on all pupils completing work to a high enough standard.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leaders ensure that staff are trained to be aware of safeguarding matters. This has helped to build a culture of keeping an eye out for the warning signs. Through weekly staff briefings, for example, staff understand the signs of abuse or concerns to look out for. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns with social services and other agencies.

You have invested in resources that pupils value, such as the Ewood Nurture Centre, which has helped pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities to feel safe in school. Leaders seek out best practice from other schools and advisers and are keen to provide the best care possible.

Inspectors talked to pupils in planned meetings and informal discussions at break-times. Pupils told us that they feel safe, know who to report concerns to and are confident that staff will deal with problems well. Some pupils were confident enough to say they had been bullied, but that the bullying had stopped after they reported

it to staff. Younger pupils say they sometimes feel uncomfortable when older pupils push in queues. They described some name-calling but say this is always resolved when staff are present. These occasional incidents have not left them feeling unsafe or prevented them from saying they enjoy coming to school.

A small, but significant, number of pupils, parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted surveys said they did not think bullying was dealt with well. Some pupils confirmed they had experienced bullying but said it had now stopped and staff had supported them well. Although you monitor the incidence of bullying, the analysis of bullying statistics, to help move towards a system that prevents incidents occurring in the first place, could be sharpened further.

Pupils are positive about the scheduled 'SPACE' days and assemblies, which regularly cover safeguarding matters, such as the risks of child exploitation. This helps them understand risks and promotes their well-being.

While safeguarding is effective, leaders can still do more to promote the very best practice in school. You have just started to raise awareness of the latest updates to the 2018 version of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. There were one or two small misunderstandings among staff about how they should report certain types of concern.

Inspection findings

- You have started to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance, particularly for those who attract the pupil premium funding and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Inspectors found some encouraging signs for the current academic year, with fewer fixed-term exclusions compared to the same period last year and an improving trend in attendance.
- However, fixed-term exclusions in the 2017/18 academic year were worryingly high, particularly for pupils who attract the pupil premium funding and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. You have recognised that your current policy may be contributing to these high rates and you are now reviewing it. Similarly, you are aware that the pupil premium spending plan needs to be improved. You recognise the need to ensure that strategies are carefully targeted to reduce the use of fixed-term exclusions for some of your most vulnerable pupils.
- Our observations of pupils in lessons and social times indicate that they conduct themselves well, and are respectful of each other and polite to adults. The pupils we talked to are proud of the school and enjoy opportunities for responsibility, such as participating in the school council.
- As the result of leaders' actions, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress. It is evident that the leadership of, and provision for, these pupils are strong. Detailed plans are now produced to identify pupils' support needs and to provide appropriate assistance. Pupils describe the support they receive in English and mathematics as very valuable. This was supported by an observation of an intervention session and an analysis of progress data.

- The care offered to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is impressive. Many take advantage of the option to attend the Ewood Centre at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Many of the pupils interviewed said it helps to build their confidence and helps them to feel safe in school. Other evidence, such as the attendance statistics for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities for 2017/18, indicates care and support are effective.
- Early signs of improvement in teaching are evident, for example in mathematics. However, there are still gaps in pupils' knowledge that need to be addressed in both the short and longer term. You have recruited well-qualified teachers and have secured external support from a specialist leader of education to help raise standards quickly. This support has begun to have a positive effect, although there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the curriculum. For example, some teachers do not set work that enables all groups of learners to achieve the progress they are capable of. It was in the lessons where teaching was less strong that we observed a lack of engagement from some learners and lower standards of presentation.
- Further plans to improve subject choices and the curriculum to motivate and engage learners are being developed, including offering a new range of vocational options in 2019. Notwithstanding these developments, there are good links to local colleges. Effective careers guidance is ensuring that progression rates for pupils into training, further education or employment with training are good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- action is taken to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities
- the consistency of teaching improves, so teachers have high expectations of all groups of pupils, including the most able
- the curriculum is further developed to help pupils of all interests and abilities to make stronger progress
- more precise analysis of the pupil premium spending plan is undertaken to make sure that disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively
- staff are completely up to date with the latest guidance on safeguarding and have a precise understanding of how all types of concerns should be raised.

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

Yours sincerely

John McNally
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings took place with school leaders, members of the local governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Discussions were held with pupils, both formally and around the school at social times.
- Inspectors examined a range of the school's documentation, such as: its self-evaluation; improvement plans; assessment information about pupils' progress; the pupil premium plan; minutes of governing body meetings; attendance and behaviour records; bullying information; special educational needs support plans; and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors considered the 70 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, the 144 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the 49 responses to the online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors conducted learning walks with senior leaders and lesson observations across a range of subjects and year groups.
- An intervention session for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities was observed.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in pupils' English and mathematics books by undertaking a work analysis.