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7 July 2011

Mr R Flood
Headteacher
Norden High School and Sports College
Stourton Street
Rishton
Blackburn
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Flood,

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Norden High School and Sports College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 July 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to your students, governors and School Improvement Partner.

Since the last inspection, there have been some significant changes to staffing within the school. The headteacher has resigned to take up post elsewhere and leaves at the end of the summer term. The head and deputy head of English left at the end of the summer term last year to take up posts elsewhere. An interim headteacher has been appointed until December and the substantive post will be advertised in the autumn. This year the school was recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as one of the top 100 most improved schools in the country.

As a result of the inspection on 1 July 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Since the last inspection the school has made clear progress in raising attainment at Key Stage 4. Results for five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics have improved by 15 percentage points from 2009 to 2010, which is above the national average. The school's robust monitoring systems show that Year 11 students are on track to sustain improvements in 2011, particularly in English and mathematics. Results of early entry for mathematics and English are very positive. Students have a better understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals are making the same satisfactory progress as the majority of their peers.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Behaviour observed both in lessons and around the school is welcoming and positive and students report that it has further improved since the last inspection. Fixed-term exclusions have decreased significantly due to the new leadership of the behaviour support unit. Also, work on community cohesion has been developed and the school is running a very successful 'Diversity Day' for primary schools. Average attendance has been maintained, although much more rigorous monitoring systems are in place and staff report that they are held much more accountable for whole-school attendance.

Many opportunities have been created for teachers to share good practice since the last inspection and middle leaders report examples of collaborative working to improve the quality of teaching. For example, science and mathematics staff are working together on developing literacy in science in preparation for a new type of examination question. The sports specialism and modern foreign languages staff have developed an innovative way of learning through the Sports Leaders UK award which encourages team work and communication skills.

In the best lessons, teachers' planning creates suitable challenge for all levels of ability, particularly the most able, and there are good opportunities for independent learning; for example, in a Year 7 food technology class making pizzas, where students worked independently for most of the lesson, and, as a result of good planning, they took ownership of their learning and all made good progress. In the weaker lessons, tasks lack challenge, they are not suitably adjusted to meet the needs of all learners and expectations of progress at all points within the lesson are too low.

Marking has improved but the school acknowledges that, while there are some good examples of detailed written feedback at key assessment points, there is still inconsistency across departments. Levels and targets were referred to in some lessons but they are not consistently being used to plan for all abilities. The curriculum has been strengthened with an increasingly personalised focus and with more opportunities for students previously on a Step to Work programme to gain their English and mathematics GCSE, thus reducing the number of students who leave school and are not in employment, education or training.

This school has overcome many challenges in the past year with changes to staffing and the increasing attraction of local schools with brand new buildings. However, the headteacher and his team have worked through these and managed to sustain improvements and raise standards. Clear and robust systems of accountability are now in place throughout the school. Challenging targets are set at both key stages; monitoring and intervention strategies have been tightened and are more focussed. Data and information are effectively shared, analysed and used by staff to promote improvement. The School Improvement Partner is working successfully with the school to assist them in their continued focus to improve outcomes and has done some very effective training with governors to strengthen their ability to hold the school to account.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school.
This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 1 July 2010

- To raise attainment at Key Stage 4 so that the proportion of students gaining five GCSEs at A* to C grades including English and mathematics is above the national average by 2012.
- Further increase the proportion of outstanding and good teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - best practice in teaching is shared across departments
 - there is a greater focus on independent and group learning skills
 - marking in all subjects gives a clear indication to students of what they need to do to improve
 - all students understand their targets, the ways in which to achieve them and how to aspire beyond them.