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23 January 2013

Mr Phil Loftus
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Loftus

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Norton College

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected the college on 22 January 2013 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to members of the governing body, the executive headteacher and students who took the time to talk to me

Since the previous inspection nine teachers have left the college and 13 teachers, of whom eight are newly qualified, have joined the staff. The senior leadership team has been restructured and this includes the appointment of a deputy headteacher. Appointments to lead the sixth form and English have been made from existing staffing. There are six new members of the governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 14 June 2012, the college 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 college is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

Improvements to achievement commented on in the previous report have been sustained. Results for Year 11 were a significant improvement on the previous year. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades in English and mathematics was in line with national averages. Students in the current Year 11 are on track to do even better. There remains significant variation between different groups of students. For example, students who have extra support in class do not do as well as other groups. The progress students make in Key Stage 3 is also improving but the variation in the progress made by different groups is still marked. For example, the progress made by students for whom the pupil premium provides extra support lags behind other groups. Achievement in the sixth form has also improved, although this is more modest than the gains made by students in the main part of the college.

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The improvements in achievements have been brought about because the college has focused sharply on improving teaching. Leaders have worked hard to make sure the new teachers understand what is expected of them. Leaders take swift and effective action on the few occasions when teaching is inadequate. The quality of teaching is checked regularly. This supports senior and middle leaders in maintaining an accurate view of the improvements needed in students' work. Teaching in the sixth form has improved because new appointments have brought more secure subject knowledge. A bespoke approach to guiding students onto the right courses in the sixth form has been recently introduced but it is too soon to evaluate the effect this has had on improving students' achievement.

Teachers are keen to improve their practice and they have responded swiftly to the expectations of the headteacher and senior leaders. They consistently plan interesting and active tasks for students. Consequently, students tackle their work enthusiastically and demonstrate self-discipline in solving problems for themselves. For example, teachers took a back seat while Year 12 made compelling arguments in a provoking debate about the ability of the media to portray reality. Students say they are regularly expected to complete more demanding work at home. Their writing skills are improving because teachers ask them to write at length but not all subjects do this well.

Teachers are getting good quality information about students' progress. The new progress leaders and subject leaders are effective in spotting which students are not doing as well as they should. When this happens students get extra help quickly. Teachers' use of the progress information to plan work to meet the needs of all students has not improved enough. Often students complete the same task at the same rate regardless of ability. Consequently, the most able are not challenged enough and the least able struggle to keep up.

The college has begun to improve students' reading and students get regular opportunities to read and discuss what they have read. Students are keen to answer questions but teachers do not routinely expect extended answers or challenge sloppy speech.

Students are appreciative of the changes the college has made since the previous inspection. They say all teachers use the new 'behaviour charter' well and this helps them to show how well they can behave when they are trusted to work in groups. Teachers are getting better at helping students to check the quality of their own work and working out what they need to do next. Lessons are providing better opportunities to promote students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Some subjects do this very well. For example, in art, students in Year 9 made models following independent research about how bullying can affect young people's lives.

The governing body and trustees have wasted no time in reviewing the work they do in holding the college to account. They regularly visit lessons and look at students' work. During their meetings with senior staff, members of the governing body ask more searching questions and this helps them in building an accurate view of how well the college is doing.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose and provides helpful milestones and guidance for senior leaders. The support offered by the executive headteacher has been used effectively to ensure senior and middle leaders maintain a candid evaluation of the work of the college. The college leaders have stopped working in other schools to focus on the needs of Norton College. The governing body and the sponsor are exploring how the college's partners could support middle leaders in developing their skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2012

- Improve achievement in all year groups by:
 - consistently and robustly monitoring the quality of teaching in lessons to improve learning
 - improving teaching of advanced courses so that sixth form students achieve in line with national expectations
 - holding middle managers and leaders to account for the professional development of their teams and the consistent application of college policies, including the setting of homework
 - developing a rigorous plan for improving literacy, especially students' writing
 - ensuring that teachers' planning, including the setting of objectives, always provides for the full range of abilities in their classes
 - ensuring that all lessons contribute appropriately to students' spiritual, moral, social and especially cultural development.

- Improve the processes by which the governing body holds senior leaders to account by:
 - setting specific targets and actions for senior leaders and holding them more rigorously to account
 - ensuring that senior leaders are only released to work in other schools if this can be done without any negative impact on Norton's students.

- Promote higher expectations of students' attitudes to and involvement in their learning by:
 - ensuring that all students are set meaningful homework regularly, appropriate to their age, some of which will develop their extended writing skills
 - providing consistently helpful reference criteria and guidance on learning objectives for students working on self- and peer-assessment
 - increasing the level of challenge required of students in oral and interactive lesson activities
 - helping students to understand the differences between satisfactory and good behaviour, so that they foster an effective learning culture in all classes.