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Caroline Brooker
Headteacher
North Walsham High School
Spenser Avenue
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Norfolk
NR28 9HZ

Dear Mrs Brooker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to North Walsham High School

Following my visit to your school on 8 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that all pupils are challenged and inspired to achieve the highest possible levels in all lessons, and modify the lesson observation system to accurately monitor this
- Ensure that records of governors' meetings are sharper at recording and monitoring progress towards targets
- Ensure that students are given more opportunities to develop skills of independent learning and problem solving to support learning.

Evidence

During the visit, I had meetings with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated, together with recent performance

data, assessment records and the lesson observation system. A total of seven lessons were visited with you to evaluate learning in mathematics and English at Key Stage 3.

Main findings

The school now has the provisional results of GCSE examinations for 2013. These show a decline in English, but an improvement for mathematics and science results especially for the significant number of students taking triple science.

The school has put much development into the assessment of students' attainment and progress. This process is now both systematic and accurate, giving teachers a good view of how individuals and groups are making progress. Often, this information is used to plan lessons so that they are pitched at a high level and all students make the best possible progress. For example in a Year 8 mathematics group, the teacher used questioning to skilfully check learning, following up with short periods of support for those who had not grasped the concept being discussed. This ensured that all students learned well.

In some other lessons, for example English, teachers do not challenge students sufficiently, especially those with lower prior attainment. This means that they do not catch up and so make slow progress. Teachers have undertaken much professional development to improve the quality of teaching. Although it is too soon to be sure of an impact, it is clear that the progress pupils make in Key Stage 3 is improving. Students are slow to develop important skills of independent learning and problem solving because they are not systematically given opportunities to practise them in class. The quality of marking of students' written work has improved.

You and your colleagues have taken on board the issues identified at the last inspection. You have, rightly, put much effort into the improvement of teaching. Best practice is now shared on a regular and systematic basis. Action plans produced in response to the last inspection are very detailed and comprehensive. You have an accurate view of teaching in terms of the judgements that you award for lesson observations. However the system that is used for this does not always recognise when pupils are not learning at a high enough level so that corrective action can be taken.

Governors support the school well and bring many strengths to their role. The results of the external review of governance recommended at the last inspection have not yet been released. It is clear however that the challenge made to you and your colleagues has improved. Governors have undertaken much training, for example on the interpretation of school performance data. Their role in the performance management of teachers is improving and they have made a start to the process of holding teachers to account for the performance of their students. Governors have reviewed their own performance and have a detailed plan concerning their own training and professional development.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Through the local authority's 'Norfolk to Good and Great' programme the school has accessed much support. This has included training for governors. Staff have benefitted from training from the local authority and independent consultants. This has included training to improve assessment and the monitoring of progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector