

Norton Canes High School

Burntwood Road, Norton Canes, Cannock, WS11 9SP

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement requires improvement because students' progress, including progress in English and mathematics, has been weak, and fell further in 2013.
- Too many students for whom the school receives additional funding did not achieve as well as they should have done in 2013.
- In some lessons for all ranges of ability, more able students are not pushed to make as much progress as they can.
- Marking in many subjects does not provide enough guidance to help students improve.
- In some instances, expectations of what students can achieve are too low.
- The sixth form requires improvement because, although standards are rising, many students do not make the expected progress. They would benefit from more support when moving up from Year 11.
- Leadership requires improvement because the school's analysis of its own performance lacks rigour and clarity. As a result, the impact that leaders, managers and governors have on teaching and students' achievement is not as focused as it needs to be.
- The implementation of some improvements has been slowed because the appropriate staff have not been available.

The school has the following strengths

- The progress of students currently in the school has accelerated sharply, and is now in line with expectations.
- The headteacher enjoys the confidence of the school community, and there is a widespread belief that the school is improving.
- The school tracks teachers' effectiveness carefully, and the headteacher has taken decisive action to deal with poor performance.
- Students feel very safe, and behaviour in lessons and around the school is orderly and responsible.
- Improvements have been made to the school's curriculum to increase the challenge and interest it offers.
- Attendance is improving rapidly and there has been a significant and continuing fall in fixed-term exclusions.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons taught by 23 different teachers; six of these lessons were seen jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team. Visits were made to the Resource Base for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, the Student Development Centre, form time and an assembly, and inspectors observed students’ conduct at break and lunchtimes.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, class teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, and the school’s improvement partner.
- Inspectors met with three groups of students selected at random from the school roll, and spoke with many others informally, both in lessons and around the school.
- Students’ work was routinely scrutinised in lessons, and inspectors looked more systematically at the English and mathematics books of less able students in Year 11.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including: development plans and their evaluations; governing body minutes; case studies; policies; safeguarding records; curriculum materials; and school publicity and newsletters. Inspectors paid close attention to records of progress made by students currently in the school, and what it indicated about the achievement of different groups of students.
- Inspectors took into consideration the 10 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, the school’s records of parent surveys, and one letter from an individual parent. The 20 responses to the questionnaire for school staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mary Hinds	Additional Inspector
Julie Griffiths	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Norton Canes High School is a smaller-than-average secondary school, with a specialism in mathematics and computing.
- The overwhelming majority of students come from White British backgrounds, and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of the students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for particular groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is broadly average.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average; the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly below average. Students experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or specific learning difficulty, and there are a very few students with a range of other needs.
- In September 2013, the school opened specially resourced provision (the Resource Base) which provides support for four students with autistic spectrum disorder.
- Sixth form provision is jointly organised with Kingsmead School, and most students attend courses on both sites. The sixth form has grown significantly this year.
- Some Key Stage 4 students undertake alternative courses at Chase Aqua Rural Centre, Nova Training, Peak Pursuits, and Veolia Environmental. All but one of these placements are part-time.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the momentum for improving teaching is accelerated by:
 - challenging the more able students in all groups to make consistently good or better progress
 - building on the good practice of the English department to provide all students with clear, regular guidance on how to improve their work.
- Raise the proportion of students making better than expected progress by:
 - ensuring all students have aspirational targets, updated regularly, which they understand
 - implementing rigorously recent improvements to the tracking and support of sixth form students.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by making sure that:
 - high expectations of academic progress and attitudes to learning are established throughout the school
 - sound judgements on school priorities are securely based on all available evidence
 - leaders at all levels prepare full evaluations of the success of their work, based clearly on the data about students' achievement
 - staff are recruited and deployed to take forward the Resource Base, the Student Development Centre and the implementation of a strategy for numeracy.

An external review of governance and a review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is average in some year groups, and somewhat below average in others, including the current Year 7. By some measures, recent cohorts of students have left with average levels of attainment, but their average point score in both English and mathematics has been below that achieved nationally.
- Over recent years, there has been no sustained improvement in achievement in GCSE level. Progress in English, mathematics and science has usually been significantly below average, and the proportion of students making expected progress and the proportion making more than expected progress in both English and mathematics have been low. Over time, progress for the fairly small proportions of students, largely of high ability, who take GCSEs in French and humanities has improved.
- In 2013, the proportion of students attaining a good GCSE in English declined sharply, and, as a consequence, the school fell below the current floor standard. The attainment of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium was on average two grades lower than that of other students in the school in both English and mathematics, and the gap in progress was very wide. The progress of the least able students was particularly weak, whereas that of the most able was broadly average. Students attained highly in geography and resistant materials.
- Two significant factors in the 2013 results were the reduction by the examination board of marks internally awarded in English, and the school's provision of alternative programmes which led to too few examination passes for a number of less able students.
- However, the school's data indicate that in almost all subjects, including English and mathematics, students in all year groups are now making good progress: the proportions making expected progress are at or above those seen nationally. This improvement was confirmed by the standards of work seen in classrooms, and by the local authority, both in their written evaluations of the school's progress, and in discussion with inspectors. The curriculum has been amended so that all students, including those accessing alternative provision, have the opportunity to gain a good number of grades in GCSE or equivalent examinations. The progress of more able students is particularly strong.
- These data also show that disabled students and those with special educational needs are making expected progress in line with their peers. The school is increasingly rigorous in identifying and supporting those who arrive in the school at low levels of attainment, or who fall behind, and uses the Year 7 'catch-up' funding appropriately to tutor students in English and mathematics. Delays in making the new Resource Base fully operational mean that it is too early to evaluate its impact on progress.
- The progress of students for whom the school is in receipt of the pupil premium is approaching that of their classmates, so that the gap between their attainment and that of others in the school is closing rapidly. The proportion making more than expected progress is increasing, but there is still a shortfall in mathematics. They are benefiting from one-to-one tuition, holiday clubs and better alternative provision. More able students continue to make the best progress, and are on track to achieve well. The school enters a handful of students early for GCSE English and mathematics where it believes they might otherwise not complete the course, and this is appropriate.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement, because progress, particularly in academic subjects, is often below that expected. Results are on an uneven upward trend, and this was

supported by the standards observed in sixth form lessons. In-year retention rates are good, because students increasingly opt for courses which they subsequently find to be rewarding, but retention at the end of Year 12 has fluctuated because of varying attainment at AS level.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement, because it does not enable all students to make sufficiently rapid progress. Teaching in English and the humanities is good, but the quality of teaching and achievement in other lessons is still too inconsistent. In particular, teaching does not always ensure that the more able students in any group are stretched.
- In all the lessons observed, professional relationships between teachers and students were positive and polite, and in most they were noticeably strong, adding to students' motivation and commitment. School records indicate that this is the norm. In discussions, students praised the friendliness of staff, and how encouraging they are. Students in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form volunteered that this is a major factor in their decision about whether to return. Teaching assistants are increasingly focused on students' academic progress, and now provide good support in classrooms.
- The school has set clear expectations for what teachers should consider in planning their lessons. However, too often the ablest students in any group have to complete simpler tasks before moving on to more demanding ones, or they are allowed to make their own decisions about which tasks to attempt. As a result, some of the abler students in the class spend at best a small proportion of the lesson time on work which challenges them to make rapid progress.
- When positive relationships are blended with high expectations, this creates an environment where students want to give of their best and work hard. Where appropriate in such lessons, teachers demonstrate the practical relevance of the learning. For example, in a Year 10 technology lesson, students were well aware of their targets and success criteria, had researched their own designs and worked independently and with confidence. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong, and they contribute effectively to students' literacy by using and defining technical terms. Learning proceeds at a quick pace, but teachers check on progress, and reinforce or recap learning when necessary.
- However, occasionally, the expectations of what students can achieve are limited or vague, and students' progress slows as they are left too long without work to do or without the tasks being refocused to sustain their interest. On occasion, activities are not securely based on what students have already learnt.
- Learning is developed when teachers question effectively. However, questioning can sometimes be a little shallow, and limited to a small proportion of the class, with the result that some students are not entirely engaged, and the teacher does not have the fullest understanding of students' progress.
- Written work is marked regularly, particularly homework. In English and in a few other classes, there is detailed, formative comment to tell students what they need to do to improve; this greatly facilitates their progress. However, in other subjects, including mathematics, this is intermittent or missing, and when asked, students were vague about their next steps. Shabby presentation is sometimes allowed to go unchallenged. Marking of sixth form work is detailed and precisely related to examination criteria, and students confirmed that they receive effective written guidance on their work, both from the school and from the partner institution.

- Teaching in the sixth form has not yet secured good progress for students, but in the lessons and work observed, expectations were high and activities well matched to students' varied needs and abilities. Students said that their study programmes encouraged them to consider the next steps in their careers. Non-qualification activities broaden their outlook and complement their main courses.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students of all ages feel very safe in school, and with justification: the school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. They say bullying or oppressive behaviour is rare, and dealt with quickly and effectively when it does arise, using procedures that are well understood. Assemblies and tutor time regularly address safety issues. All students know to whom to turn in case of personal difficulty or problems in school. They see the small size of the school positively, as it helps the staff to know students as individuals and provide a greater level of care. Parents share their views.
- The behaviour of students is good. Moving between lessons and during breaktimes, students are noticeably orderly, even in narrow corridors. During a 'wet break' pupils occupied halls and classrooms chatting quietly, and disposed of almost all the food packaging without the need for prompting. When staff made a request, students respond immediately and without fuss. No instances of aggression or irresponsibility were observed. Students respect the fabric of the school. The school confirms that this is typical behaviour.
- In the large majority of lessons, students approach their studies with enthusiasm and commitment. They bring the right equipment, and arrive punctually. They listen attentively, and are prepared to respond articulately in discussion, even when ideas are complex and challenging. When teaching is less well matched to students' abilities or the pace of the lesson slows, students' enthusiasm wanes somewhat, but even in these circumstances there is little off-task behaviour. Students report that behaviour is good in classrooms, although occasionally individuals shout out or 'mess about'. Behaviour in the Resource Base has suffered from the instability in staffing, but the school is confident that it is now in a position to make rapid improvements.
- Where expectations are high, students readily adopt conscientious attitudes to learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, when the teacher asked the class to draw geometric figures, students spontaneously took out rulers and pencils. Such expectations are not universal, however, and in some exercise books, standards of presentation are variable, often reflecting the extent of teachers' care.
- Attitudes to learning in the sixth form are improving, as students take responsibility for their own learning. They believe that their study programmes are challenging and relevant to their aspirations, and this deepens their commitment to their courses. They nevertheless lack a measure of confidence, and are reluctant to seek additional academic support from staff in the partner school or where classes are large.
- Historically, attendance at the school has been below average, and fixed term exclusion rates have been high. The attendance and behaviour of vulnerable groups of students, and particularly those in receipt of free school meals, have been particularly problematic. Two years ago, the school decided to adopt a radically different approach to students who were disengaged, and as a consequence, attendance has risen and exclusions have more than halved. Both trends are continuing. Levels of attendance are now average, and rates of fixed-term exclusion approaching the national average. There has been one permanent exclusion since the last inspection.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement primarily because leaders' analysis of performance and of the effectiveness of the school's actions is insufficiently sharp and wide-ranging. Both the school's self-evaluation form and other documents do not always evaluate impact using accurate numerical data. This means that leaders cannot always judge with sufficient precision the effect of their actions or explain outcomes. This applies to the school's evaluation of pupil premium expenditure: the cost of each strand is listed, and the overall effect summarised, but without an adequate analysis of the success of each strategy, in order to make subsequent plans.
- The school has identified the right priorities, but some less senior leaders need training in how to incorporate whole-school priorities into their plans for improving their own areas of responsibility. Staff at all levels are not always required to produce clear evaluations of the success of their work; this means that senior leaders and governors are not best equipped to plan for the school's future development.
- The school's curriculum is now better adapted to the needs and abilities of all students. There is a good balance of subjects at Key Stage 3, with sufficient focus on developing students' reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stage 4 there are appropriate courses for students of differing abilities and interests, including alternative programmes which form part of an appropriately broad curriculum for the individuals involved. This is having a direct impact on achievement. In 2013, all Year 11 leavers progressed into education, training or employment. The school provides GCSEs in astronomy and psychology after school to enrich the experience of the most able.
- Expectations for some students are not high enough, and target setting should ensure that aspirational targets have sufficient prominence, and are updated if students are on track to reach them before the end of the key stage. Less-experienced staff would benefit from more support in holding some students to account for the quality of their work.
- Students' moral education is developed through the tutorial programme, and this contributes well to a cohesive, orderly community. Students appreciate the wide range of sporting and artistic activities available. However, the school does not provide enough insight into other cultures and traditions to support students as they move into wider society, or give sufficiently full guidance on their future careers. Whereas Key Stage 4 students are increasingly well-informed about the best courses for them as individuals in the sixth form, they require a more impartial appraisal of the other options available to them.
- The school manages the performance of teachers rigorously, and uses the results to inform decisions about salary progression. Through this process and through other regular monitoring, senior leaders have a clear and largely accurate view of the quality of individuals' teaching. The school has then acted decisively to tackle underperformance.
- The school has also taken transformational steps to tackle the school's historic failure to secure the engagement of a minority of disaffected students, which had in turn resulted in a legacy of high rates of exclusion and absence. This new approach, centred on the Student Development Centre, has yielded major improvements in attendance and rates of fixed term exclusion, but the school has been unable yet to evaluate its impact on achievement.
- The headteacher's willingness to make bold decisions has gained the respect and confidence of the staff, students and wider community. Over time, these are improving the quality of teaching. However, in the medium term, it has led to discontinuities and gaps in staffing. These in turn have slowed progress, for example in developing a numeracy strategy (to ensure students use

mathematical skills consistently in other subjects), establishing the Resource Base for students with autistic spectrum disorders and refining procedures in the Student Development Centre.

- The leadership of the sixth form is improving, as students are now tracked effectively in line with main school procedures: this must be pursued with rigour and tenacity. Progress towards establishing study programmes has been good. More attention to transition from Year 11 is required to ensure that students can adapt smoothly to the demands of post-16 courses, and improve their confidence in working with the staff and students from the larger partner school. The expansion of the sixth form has put a strain on resources, which must be managed carefully to ensure all courses offer the same quality of opportunity.
- The local authority has provided appropriate support for the school since the last inspection, particularly in English. It has sought to ensure that the school's judgments about students' attainment and progress are accurate.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governors understand their role in challenging and supporting the school's leaders, and are keen to become more effective in doing so. Governors receive data regularly on students' progress and attainment, and understand the general implications and how students in the school compare with students nationally. However, governors sometimes find it hard to challenge senior leaders in detail, partly because the agenda is crowded, and partly because the data are not always reported in the clearest fashion. Key governors have valuable skills, for example, in finance and information technology, which are used to examine and support the school's work. There are emerging links with key departments. Some governors interpret their role in a limited sense, which places a heavy load on those who are more active. The governing body is fully aware of the challenges presented by the falling roll, and is determined not to go into deficit, supporting the headteacher in prioritising expenditure and making redundancies if required.
- The governing body fulfils all its obligations, receiving reports on the quality of teaching in the school, managing the performance of the headteacher, and accepting recommendations based on the performance management of teachers. It ensures the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. The headteacher reports on the use of the pupil premium termly. Governors are anxious to improve their skills, but have struggled to find training which meets their precise needs.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124395
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	442553

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	422
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Teresa Ellis
Headteacher	Sara Birchall
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2013
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