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17 September 2014

Sara Birchall
Headteacher
Norton Canes High School
Burntwood Road
Norton Canes
Cannock
WS11 9SP

Dear Ms Birchall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Norton Canes High School

Following my visit to your school on 16 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 April 2014. 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:

- Make the school improvement plan a more strategic document for monitoring purposes by identifying who is responsible for checking the impact of the actions against measurable milestones
- Increase the rigour by which middle leaders are held to account for their monitoring of the quality of teaching and checks on students' work, by making sure there is a consistent approach to sharing findings with senior leaders
- Make sure all students make equally good progress, including those supported by the premium grant as there is a wide gap in achievement for these students compared with others in the school and nationally, which is showing little sign of narrowing.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the Governing Body, the head of sixth form, a small group of subject leaders and a small group of teachers. A telephone conversation was also held with the commissioning manager for school improvement in the local authority. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The updated school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

You are about to start the recruitment process for a new subject leader of English, with an acting head of English in post in the interim. There have been no other significant changes to staffing since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

You quickly moved on from the initial disappointment following your experience of the inspection, and planned actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the report. Although your results are still below national averages, an improvement was seen in GCSE and also A level results in 2014. This has spurred you on even further and there is renewed energy to move forwards.

Most of the actions identified in your improvement plan have only recently been implemented and therefore you are yet to see the impact of some of your actions. The school improvement plan itself would benefit from the addition of milestones along the way to enable governors to monitor the progress with key actions and naming senior staff responsible for overseeing that action with deadlines as to when this will be done and when progress reports will be presented to governors.

You have been successful in accelerating the momentum for improving teaching. In their planning, teachers plan activities to challenge more-able students. This was seen in practice in checking a small sample of student books in which there was evidence of an increasing level of difficulty for more able students. The good practice seen in the quality of marking, and feedback given to students, in books has now been shared across the school and teachers are adopting a more consistent approach through providing time for students to think deeper about their responses. Students now respond to a challenge question, appropriate to their needs, which will improve progress for all, including the more-able. Senior leaders have a calendar to check on the quality of marking across the school, to make sure initial improvements continue. Records of other checks need to be carried out such as consistent teaching approaches being used across the subject; and findings shared with senior leaders.

Observations of teaching are carried out by subject leaders, some being done jointly with senior leaders. Some subject leaders record what they have seen during

learning walks and carry out additional observations of their own to check on the quality of teaching more frequently. This approach needs to be formalised and made more consistent across the school. Teachers are well supported to improve their teaching skills and talked about the value of being able to observe other teachers, within school and across the sixth form partnership.

A new approach to target setting has been introduced which has the potential to raise expectations. There is now a focus on good progress, rather than accepting expected progress for all students. Sixth form target setting has continued to build on improvements seen previously and a common format to checking on progress is now used effectively across the sixth form partnership of schools.

Although there has been no external review carried out of the way the school uses its pupil premium funding, you have visited a school to look at their use of this funding and have refined your practice as a result. There are early signs of improvement in the progress being made by students entitled to pupil premium funding but other students are making more rapid progress. There is further work to do so that all students make equally good progress.

An external review of governance has taken place and an action plan is being implemented in response to improvements needed. Governors have requested a simplified approach to the presentation of data and the school has invested in a new data analysis system to support this.

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

The local authority commissioning manager for school improvement has been effective in organising the review of governance and governors' training, support for literacy and numeracy development, and from a local leader of education who is working with the school to review the way in which progress is checked and strategies to accelerate progress further.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form