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Mr P Fell  
Norton Canes High School  
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Dear Mr Fell

#### Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 26 June 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please convey my thanks also to the vice chair of governors and to the group of Year 12 students for meeting with me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 29 & 30 November 2006, the school was asked to:

- Raise standards and achievement in English across the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and guidance in the sixth form so that students make better progress.
- Ensure that all levels of leadership and management are effective in improving learners' achievement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the points for improvement. I am recommending to Ofsted that we continue to monitor the school's progress.

Although the progress made by students in mathematics was outstanding last year, progress in English has been amongst the lowest of all schools nationally since 2004. Consequently there is a considerable legacy of underachievement which the school recognises it needs to tackle. Two consultants provided by the local authority (LA) have spent a substantial amount of time in the school helping Year 11 students

improve their English coursework. They have also taught catch-up classes to Year 9 during the Easter holiday and provided support to the English department on improving teaching and learning. The school judges the support it has received from its consultants as exceptionally good. Accordingly the school is predicting a sharp increase in the proportion of students attaining a good GCSE grade in English this summer. The consultants are now working with Year 10 students but action to improve achievement in English in other year groups has been limited.

Systems for tracking the academic progress of students towards their individual target grades have been improved. Classes and individuals that are underachieving are identified and interventions made to help them catch up. Sixth formers have been issued with booklets summarising their target grades and an indication of whether their current level of performance will be sufficient for them to meet their targets. Subject teachers record guidance in the booklets on how students can improve their work. Sixth form students say that they now feel that the quality of their work is monitored and that monitoring enables them to get extra support when they need it. Analysis of the tracking data confirms this. Interventions made in February were effective and the proportion of students identified as underachieving by April had reduced. However, the school is still unable to evaluate overall achievement in its sixth form.

Sixth form provision is jointly provided through a consortium with two other local high schools. The three schools have agreed a common approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Monitoring has been validated by joint lesson observations with LA consultants and the school's evaluation is that the quality of teaching its sixth form students receive is satisfactory. Clear accountability arrangements for the performance of different subject teams have been established and these will be managed by the newly created post of consortium director from September. The number of sixth form lessons cancelled has been reduced and students are set work to do on the occasions when this happens. Year 12 students feel they received poor guidance on making their option choices at the start of the year. They feel that the school has since listened to their concerns about this and are aware that changes are being made for next year in response. Sixth form students now feel they have a senior member of staff they can approach for help with confidence. Satisfactory progress has been made on improving the quality of teaching and guidance in the sixth form.

The school was slow to respond in the first few months after it was issued with a notice to improve. In the last three months it has acted upon the advice it has been receiving and better progress is now being made. Tracking has improved, as have systems for evaluating the work of the school. The Head of English decided to step down the day before the inspection. An assistant headteacher has assumed temporary responsibility for leading and managing the English team until permanent replacement can be recruited. However, improvements are either relatively recent or have been largely brought about by personnel from outside the school. The slow initial response of the school has meant that progress overall since the last inspection is inadequate. There are still uncertainties surrounding the future

leadership and staffing of the English team. The consultants have provided excellent support to Key Stage 4 students but the English department does not currently have the capacity to sustain this by itself. The governors have strengthened their systems for monitoring the work of the school. They are now well informed of the actions the school is taking and the impact they have had. They are beginning to hold the school to account for its performance.

The extent of external support provided by the LA to the school is unusually high. It consists of the provision of two consultants to support improvement in English, a consultant to support improvements in the sixth form, an associate headteacher and a district inspector. A school improvement group has been established by the district inspector which meets monthly to evaluate the impact of actions being taken to bring about improvement. Records of these meetings and other reports note concerns about a lack of urgency shown by senior leadership and consequent slow progress in the months following the inspection. The LA, the school improvement partner and the chair of governors have recorded in documents shared with the school concerns about the capacity of leadership and management to bring about the necessary improvements within the specified timescale.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

David Anstead  
Her Majesty's Inspector