

Norton Canes High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124395
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314916
Inspection dates	5–6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Frank Knowles

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	572
6th form	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	T Ellis
Headteacher	Paul Fell
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2006
School address	Burntwood Road Norton Canes Cannock WS11 9SP
Telephone number	01543 514400
Fax number	01543 514430

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Norton Canes High School is much smaller than average. Its students come mainly from White British backgrounds, with very few from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language. The sixth form is part of a consortium involving two other schools, Blake Valley and Kingsmead Technology Colleges. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is increasing, and is now just above average. For its size, the school has a well above average number of students with a statement of special educational need.

In its previous inspection in November 2006, the school was given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement was required in relation to students' achievement, especially in English and the sixth form, and to areas of leadership and management.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Norton Canes has made significant improvements since its last inspection and now provides a satisfactory education for its students. The appointment of a director of the sixth form consortium has revitalised post-16 education in the school and raised students' morale, especially in the current Year 12. Changes in the leadership in English, first as a temporary measure in April 2007 and with a permanent appointment from January 2008, have also brought about significant improvements. These changes have been underpinned by improved monitoring and evaluation of teaching by senior leaders across all age groups. This has brought a greater focus on how students learn and on assessment that informs them about what they need to do to improve. Teachers' planning is now much more consistent across the school with more group and practical work, although the level of challenge in activities does not always match students' needs, and assessment practices vary. Teachers' questioning does not always develop students' literacy skills or give students the opportunity to respond at length, with teachers sometimes doing the thinking that should come from the class. Overall, the improvements show that teaching and learning are satisfactory, including in the sixth form. Students are making better progress, helped by a better understanding of what they are expected to learn and a much improved system to check on how well they are doing. Their achievement is now satisfactory, although standards are still below average in most subjects.

Students' personal development and well-being have also improved and are now good. Students have a strong voice through student councils and they enjoy coming to school. Behaviour is good, both in class and around the school, and students comment on the very low incidence of bullying. Parents are very supportive of the school, one noting, 'There have been a number of changes in the school over the last few months and I do feel that the school is a lot better than in the past.' The school's systems for care, guidance and support are satisfactory, with good support for students who need help or are vulnerable. The way students' targets are set and reviewed has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory.

Improvement since the last inspection has accelerated in the last six months. This change of pace has been driven by a strengthened senior leadership team, better governance, and support from the local authority. In addition, the team has been supported by the work of a number of departments which, despite the difficulties faced by the school, have maintained good or outstanding practice and examination results. Analysis of assessment data has improved, providing much better information on the progress of individual students. Departments are now held to account for their teaching and their examination success. However, the school does not have an overview of the performance of departments, the overall quality of teaching and learning, or the quality of self-evaluation in departments. As a result, the school does not plan strategically how it will incorporate national initiatives into its vision or long term plans. Nevertheless, given the recent improvement, the school has the capacity to continue on its path to further development.

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The recent improvements in the sixth form have been the result of considerable development that has taken place since the appointment of a director to the consortium. Accountable to all three schools involved and part of all three senior leadership teams, the director has brought a drive for quality and consistency across the sixth forms that has had a noticeable impact in a very short time. A complete rebranding of the consortium has taken place, with a broader and more appropriate range of courses, including vocational pathways, and a common prospectus.

Sixth form teaching and learning are monitored across the consortium and the new system for checking students' progress covers all subjects and schools. As a result, students know how well they are doing, have clearer targets, and teaching and learning have both improved. Better teaching has brought about improved progress in Year 12 and the very much smaller Year 13, and achievement overall is satisfactory. Assessment data indicates some underachievement in Year 13, however, and standards were below average in 2007. Students in Year 13 note the better quality guidance and induction on entry to the sixth form that have been enjoyed by those in Year 12, and all students acknowledge the positive changes, better support and improved morale in the sixth form recently.

The improvements have also brought about greater numbers in Year 12 and a new sense of purpose through, for example, the consortium council, which is currently engaged in improving study and common room facilities in all three sixth forms in the consortium. The focus on the consortium means, however, that the sixth form does not make as full a contribution to the main part of the school as it could.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' use of spoken language in all subjects to develop their literacy skills and their ability to give extended responses.
- Plan differentiated approaches and activities in lessons to meet the needs of all students, especially the talented and most able, in each class.
- Develop a strategic overview of the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to support whole-school and departmental improvement planning.
- Take a longer-term view of the way the school needs to develop within the national agenda for change.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' achievement has improved since the last inspection and it is now satisfactory overall. This has come about through better teaching and learning. Standards, however, are still below average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported so that they make satisfactory progress, in line with the progress made by other students.

In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2007, overall results dropped slightly from those in 2006 and standards were below average. They have remained similar over several years. Mathematics standards have been at the national average for several years and students achieved well in 2007, as in previous years. Internal assessments show that in the autumn term 2007, twice as many students in Year 9 reached their targets across many subjects than was the case in 2006, and these targets were more challenging than previously. Currently, students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9.

The school's GCSE results in 2007 showed improvement over those from 2006 in almost all respects, although there was some variation between subjects. In particular the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE (including English and mathematics in the five) rose significantly. Art, child development, mathematics and religious education (RE) all showed above average results at GCSE, while most other subjects underperformed. Again, internal assessments from the autumn term 2007 show more students reaching their targets, both in Year 10 and Year 11, and the achievement of students in these year groups is also satisfactory.

Results in the sixth form were also below average in 2007, and students underachieved. The school's assessment data show an increase in the number of students in the current Year 12 whose work matches their target grade, although some underachievement still exists amongst the much smaller number of students in Year 13. Overall, achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Strong moral and social awareness is evident in students' good behaviour and positive relationships throughout the school. Students help their learning by collaborating well when working in pairs or groups. The success of their anti-bullying campaign and a very low incidence of bullying and racism have resulted in an invitation to demonstrate their approach at a county conference. Students feel safe in school and behave responsibly. Their good enjoyment of school life is evident in their good attendance, although there has recently been an increase in interrupted learning arising from family holidays. One student said, 'I would send my children to this school.'

Positive attitudes help students to make a good contribution to the school community. They appreciate the voice they are given in the life of the school through form, year and school councils. During the inspection, students voted enthusiastically in elections for a local youth parliament, for which two of their fellow students were candidates. They contribute regularly and generously to charities. Students' multicultural awareness and their spiritual development are satisfactory. Although they have no regular opportunity for reflection in school assembly, students spend considerable time in RE in personal consideration of issues raised. Students make healthy choices of food at lunchtime and understand the importance of exercise. Sporting teams and other school clubs are popular. Literacy skills are not high enough to support students' readiness for future employment, which is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teachers' planning is detailed and these plans consistently use structured and carefully timed activities that provide an appropriate pace to the learning. Students are interested in their lessons and, consequently, they concentrate on their work and behave well. They like the increasing number of subjects that create opportunities for active learning, such as using drama activities in English. Not all lessons are sufficiently well planned to match the wide range of abilities in some classes. While teachers plan effectively to support students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they often approach a topic without any reference to the needs of those students who may be gifted or talented.

The school has sensibly focused training and professional development on improving assessment skills in staff and students. Students say that they like having targets and find it valuable to have assessments and to know the next steps to improve their levels. Most students can talk confidently about their grades and their targets. There is outstanding assessment practice in some departments such as physical education (PE). In one lesson in Year 10, students were evaluating each other's trampoline skills using GCSE criteria as well as a time delayed video recording to assist their judgements. This exceptional practice is not yet embedded across all departments. The use of layers of lesson objectives ('must, should, could') are helpful to students but are not always linked to grades or levels that students understand. The school recognises that some teachers' questioning techniques still do not help students extend their thinking and speaking skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum provides breadth and continuity in learning, enabling most students to enjoy their lessons and make satisfactory progress. Clubs, including a successful dance group, provide a variety of extra-curricular opportunities that enrich students' basic curriculum. The school is developing its extended service provision though valued community links.

All students follow a full information and communication technology (ICT) course in Years 10 and 11 and, across the curriculum, ICT is playing an increasing role in supporting learning. Students value the use of the Internet to extend their studies at home. Some students have access to vocational courses through a link with a local further education college and most students enjoy the strong work experience programme. The high quality mathematics curriculum contributes well to students' future economic well-being as well as future work skills. However, the legacy of weaknesses in English in Years 8 and above, and the undeveloped provision for literacy more generally, are still creating barriers for students' learning.

The recently won Healthy School status is a recognition of the high value the school places on creating a safe and health conscious environment in which to learn. Students are able to access a range of advice from specialists, including those working in sexual health and careers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory, both in the main school and in the sixth form, with some significant strengths. The school has maintained good attendance by constant monitoring, followed by prompt action when students are not in class. An anti-bullying initiative involving students has reduced incidents significantly. Students' good behaviour is the result of clear and firm rewards and sanctions that have given them pride in the atmosphere around the school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students and for child protection are good.

Vulnerable students are carefully tracked and supported, for example through a successful workplace placement scheme that results in high levels of employment or college courses for participants. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in class and through withdrawal for literacy support, so that they make similar progress to others. The school works closely with parents, keeping them informed about their children's progress and responding quickly to concerns. Parents of Year 7 students enjoy taking part in literacy lessons with their children in the 'sprint' groups. Students know their targets and are well informed in some subjects, for example in English, about how they can improve their work and reach challenging targets. However, many do not quite reach their overall targets because of inconsistency in the quality of advice across subjects on what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

All leaders and managers are focused on the need to make rapid improvement in students' achievement and this is having a positive impact on raising standards. The local authority has provided a high level of support which has given vital momentum to school improvement over the last year. A stronger senior team is now in place and the school is in a better position to ensure that the overall pace and direction of improvement is maintained. Governors have become more effective in holding the school to account. Teaching commitments continue to hamper the headteacher's capacity for strategic leadership and management and this has constrained the school's vision, particularly in response to developments in the 14–19 curriculum.

The school benefits from some very good quality middle leadership in some subjects. The heads of these departments are sharing their skills and are coaching other staff. Improved leadership in English has recently brought much needed vision and precision to improvement planning.

Whole school self-evaluation is now sharper and priorities are clearly expressed. A coherent and shared approach to improvement priorities ensures all departments and teachers are focusing on the same issues. There is very good departmental self-evaluation in mathematics. Elsewhere, the school's requirements for departmental evaluation do not encourage staff to develop their individuality or their evaluative skills. A well planned system of monitoring teaching and learning is in place and senior leaders have an accurate view of their quality. However, this has not contributed to a strategic overview of the quality of teaching across subjects and through the school.

The school is now setting more challenging targets that stretch students appropriately. Systems to track students' progress are fully in place and assessment data are being analysed thoroughly to identify underachievement and to target intervention where it is most needed. Leadership of the pastoral and academic monitoring system is strong.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Norton Canes High School, Cannock WS11 9SP

Thank you for your warm welcome and openness when we inspected your school. We found your contributions very helpful, whether you took part in the focus groups, spoke with us in lessons or around the school, or shared your work with us.

Many of you told us about the considerable improvements that the school has made in the last year. We found this too and decided your school no longer needs its Notice to Improve, as it is now providing you with a satisfactory education. Better teaching and a much better tracking system mean that you are now making satisfactory progress. Your work in form, year and school councils gives you a strong voice in the school. We saw you being courteous and thoughtful to each other as you moved around the school and we found your behaviour was good.

Many of the improvements have come about through stronger senior leadership, but we also recognised the really good work done in some subjects such as art, child development, mathematics, PE and RE, and the help the school has had from outside. We agreed with sixth form students that the improvements in the sixth form, through the consortium, were good too.

There is still more to do, however, and we have asked the governors, headteacher and staff to make some improvements in four areas:

- encouraging you to make longer contributions in class when you are asked questions, so that you are more confident in expressing your own ideas
- planning activities in lessons that challenge you all, especially those of you that are particularly good in that subject
- ensuring they have a clear view of how well the school does in each subject, how departments are doing and the quality of teaching across the school
- making plans for improving the school that stretch further into the future.

You can do your bit by always finding out from teachers what you need to do to improve your work so you can meet, or even exceed, your targets.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Knowles Lead inspector

7 February 2008

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Lead inspector