

Norton College

Woodbury Lane, Norton, Worcestershire WR5 2BA

Inspection dates

1–3 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have a strong positive impact on the quality of provision at the school and have ensured that independent school standards are met. As a result, pupils make good progress.
- A powerful ethos of 'welcome to all' drives the success of the school. Consequently, pupils with a variety of severe difficulties make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Safeguarding is robust. Pupils feel safe at all times. This feeling of security helps pupils to settle down. Parents greatly value the school's work in making such a difference to their children's behaviour and confidence.
- Leaders have created a cohesive teaching and pastoral care team. The team's skills in teaching, learning and behavioural support ensure that pupils make good progress.
- A broad, varied and often inspiring curriculum motivates pupils. Staff take great care in ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to study subjects that interest them.
- The actions of directors improve pupils' progress. Some directors lack full knowledge of the independent school standards.
- The emphasis on one-to-one teaching ensures that all pupils have lessons that cater for their individual needs. However, leaders do not put a strong enough emphasis on professional development to improve teaching methods or give enough emphasis to colleagues sharing good practice.
- Teachers use questioning well to promote learning. In mathematics, though, they do not promote pupils' reasoning skills often enough. Consequently, pupils make less progress in this aspect of mathematics.
- Some pupils do not use a wide variety of words when talking and in their writing. Teachers help them to use new words in English lessons but there is a lack of emphasis on vocabulary learning across the curriculum. As a result, some pupils' use of words does not improve fast enough.
- In some situations, staff involve the pupils in informal discussion of issues. However, teachers do not often involve them in formal discussion, debate and decision-making. As a result, pupils do not experience the practical ways in which democracy works.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership by ensuring that:
 - directors have an in-depth understanding of the independent school standards
 - professional development is provided to improve teaching strategies
 - skilled teachers have opportunities to share their expertise with their peers.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that:
 - pupils have good opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics
 - teachers support pupils to develop a wide vocabulary to use in their talking and writing across the curriculum.
- Improve personal development even further by creating more opportunities for pupils to take part in discussion and debate so that they fully develop their understanding of democracy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met. Their evaluation of how well the school is doing is robust. They know their strengths and they know actions that need to be taken to effect improvements.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and directors have employed three more assistant headteachers and a new deputy headteacher. This strengthened team has a significant impact on management of all areas of the school. Consequently, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Leaders have also employed more science and information and communication technology (ICT) teachers, as well as a wide variety of skilled specialists in vocational subjects, for example art, music and computer animation. As a result, pupils have a very wide choice of subjects to choose from in addition to their English and mathematics lessons. Leaders ensure that they respond to any pupil's desire to learn about any subject. Recently, a teacher of Japanese has given lessons in Japanese and Japanese cooking because of pupils' interests.
- This broad, balanced and often inspiring curriculum enables pupils to make progress in both their personal and academic education. Consequently, the pupils are supported in every aspect of their development.
- The bespoke nature of the curriculum enables pupils to follow education programmes at pre-GCSE, GCSE and A Level, plus functional skills and a range of BTEC vocational qualifications. As a result, every pupil is able to work towards success at his or her own level.
- Two of the new assistant headteachers have extensive experience as Special Needs Managers for the local authority and experience of working with children looked after. They know what needs to be done to help these pupils to succeed. Consequently, pupils are strongly supported in every aspect of their development.
- The senior management team has developed a clear set of priorities that have had a positive effect on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. They have developed a wider curriculum, a stronger emphasis on assessment, tracking and target setting and stronger provision in the sixth form. Questioning skills of teachers have also improved. These improved priorities have had a significant impact on pupils' experiences and progress.
- Staff morale is high. Relationships at all levels are good. The vast majority of staff who completed the Ofsted inspection survey indicated that they very much enjoy working at the school and that the management are considerate of their well-being. From the large numbers of written comments from staff a typical response was 'Leadership is very clear, decisive and supportive. There is a compassionate, friendly and supportive atmosphere... best place I have ever worked!' Teachers who spoke to the inspector also made very similar comments.
- The school keeps excellent records of all pupils and their individual needs. Education, health and care (EHC) plans for all pupils are well documented and carefully followed. Records of each individual pupil's behaviour and starting points are thorough and provide

a reliable basis for discussing their academic and social progress. Strong leadership ensures that pupils' individual needs are catered for well.

- Before pupils join the school, leaders work closely with parents and other stakeholders to gather information, which assists with the smooth transition process. Close working with a variety of other agencies contributes well to sustainable improvement in pupils' personal and academic development. Leaders are held in high regard by the local authority teams who place pupils in their care.
- Arrangements for pupils to enjoy individual lessons with teachers are managed exceptionally well. Procedures are so clear that the pastoral care manager knows where each pupil or student is at all times. He also can assess their likely state of mind. Consequently, pupils are always safe and staff are able to respond quickly to support the pupils and each other during any emotional outbursts.
- Leaders have put in place assessment procedures to ensure that pupils' progress is effectively monitored and recorded in English and mathematics. These procedures are also beginning to be used in science. Consequently, they know pupils' starting points and how much progress they have made. They are also able to identify gaps in their previous knowledge so that these can be addressed in teaching. Teachers are also able to take measures to arrest any slowing of progress.
- Leaders also assess, monitor and track pupils' improvements in behaviour. This enables them to be supportive to individual pupils and to the teaching staff. They make improvements explicit to pupils so that they are motivated and encouraged to do even better in the future.
- Leaders have created strong relationships with parents and carers. Transport arrangements are good, with many pupils being collected for school by members of the pastoral staff team. Consequently, they have daily contact with parents, which enables pupils' personal problems to be addressed without delay. In this way, staff also ensure that the attendance of pupils improves extremely quickly.
- Those parents who spoke to the inspector were overwhelmingly appreciative of the work of the school in supporting their children. Typical remarks included, 'Norton College is a life-saving raft. The future is promising for my child now.' Another parent said, 'My child has come on leaps and bounds. He has learnt to regulate himself. I am over the moon!'
- Leaders rightly have an exceptionally strong focus on the well-being and personal development of all pupils. However, their focus on developing teaching strategies has been less strong. As a result, there has been insufficient professional development for teachers to develop their teaching strategies. Consequently, pupils do not always benefit from a variety of strategies to support them to catch up academically.

Governance

- The four directors, one of whom is the headteacher, are fully involved in all aspects of school management. The headteacher is a strong, inspiring presence in the school at all times for staff and pupils alike. The three other directors have monthly meetings with the senior management team as well as being in weekly contact with the headteacher for a variety of reasons. As a consequence, they are closely involved in management and are well placed to address any issues.

- Each of the three non-executive directors has his or her clear responsibilities with significant expertise in their own areas that are of benefit to Norton College. However, they do not have sufficient in-depth knowledge of the independent school standards. As a result, they are not in as good a position as they could be to challenge the leadership.

Safeguarding

- Leaders have created a strong culture of shared responsibility for protecting pupils. Consequently, pupils are safe and well supported.
- Leaders have ensured that a good-quality safeguarding and child protection policy is available on the website. The safeguarding policy and practice are extremely robust and meet current government requirements.
- All staff are appropriately trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns and ensuring that they inform outside agencies when a pupil is at risk or missing from education. Staff keep appropriate records that detail safeguarding concerns and actions. Staff are well trained to recognise signs of extremism and radicalisation.
- The building is well maintained and kept to an appropriately safe standard, with clear access to doors in case of fire. The health and safety officer regularly checks the building for fire risk and other safety hazards. Leaders rigorously maintain risk assessments for all aspects of school life and for individual pupils where necessary. This includes robust risk assessments of all off-site facilities that the pupils use.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- A calm learning environment ensures that pupils feel secure and therefore able to apply themselves to learning. Teachers care deeply about pupils' personal well-being and educational progress. Relationships between staff and pupils are based on mutual respect. All of this helps pupils to work steadily and to make good progress.
- The school's assessment processes ensure that they know pupils' starting points as soon as they arrive in school. Regular diagnostic assessment identifies gaps in learning that have developed because of the lengths of time that pupils have not been attending their previous schools. Teachers are then able to ensure that these gaps in learning are filled. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this and knowledge from assessments to plan appropriately for their pupils.
- Pupils have the vast majority of lessons with their teachers one-to-one. In this way, teachers can ensure that individual needs are met. This way of working strongly supports the social, emotional and mental health needs of the pupils. They are able to concentrate on their learning in an exceptionally supportive atmosphere. They know that they have their teacher's full attention. Teachers are able to support them with each step of the way. They ask questions that are specific to the developing knowledge and skills of the particular pupil. As a result, all pupils are challenged at a level that enables them to make good progress.

- Teachers are highly skilled at managing pupils who have presented high levels of challenge to teachers in other schools. They manage behaviour well because they have close trusting relationships with their pupils. They are also able to adapt the pace of learning to each pupil's needs.
- All pupils have English and mathematics lessons that lead them to qualifications. All pupils also have lessons in science and ICT and some of them gain qualifications in these. In addition, they enjoy a wide variety of vocational subjects, for example art, carpentry, computer animation, music, building skills like bricklaying, plastering and painting as well as car mechanics, design technology and cooking.
- Clear links between subjects enable pupils to develop further in their learning. Teachers are able to create very good links because they know the needs of individual pupils exceptionally well. For example, one pupil used his mathematical skills during carpentry when he accurately measured sections of wood. Another pupil has shown good progress in English writing because he is deeply involved with learning to compose raps in his music lessons. Highly challenging computer animation lessons are closely linked with screen writing. Pupils make faster progress in English or mathematics while enjoying their practical vocational subjects.
- The pupils have had few opportunities to make choices in their lives until they come to Norton College. Through negotiation with their teachers, pupils make choices about when to have their individual lessons. This element of choice ensures that they come to lessons when they have chosen to do so, with the expectation that they will have English and mathematics lessons at least three times per week. A highly effective reward system motivates them to comply with this expectation. Consequently, pupils are able to feel positive from the start of each lesson.
- Two extremely spacious sports halls are available for pupils to learn sports. In addition, they have a variety of opportunities in the outdoors. Off-site facilities include three farms, a woodland where forest learning is offered and a fishing lake. As a result, pupils have a wide range of learning activities to choose from.
- The school offers learning packages to pupils who are unable to come to school, due to their extreme anxiety. The school's home tuition team work alongside pupils in the home environment where necessary, enabling these pupils to achieve qualifications. In addition to this, the school offers twilight times for lessons between 2pm and 5pm. At this time, the school is quiet. Some very anxious pupils find themselves able to come to school at this time when they can benefit from support of the whole staff team. This can act as a stepping stone to full engagement with school in the future.
- The vast majority of pupils at the school find collaboration with other students exceptionally difficult. One teacher engages pupils in collaborative discussion and decision-making around the game of 'Dungeons and Dragons'. The discussion between four sixth-form pupils with autism observed by the inspector was of exceptionally high quality. The students showed that they had learned to listen, ask questions and respond to each other. They all showed a high level of thinking and reasoning. The teacher showed exceptional skills as a facilitator. At present, this teaching skill has not been developed widely among the rest of the staff. As a result, all pupils do not benefit from such opportunities.
- Some pupils do not know enough words to use to enable their speaking or writing to develop fast enough. In English lessons, teachers support them to use a wider

vocabulary. However, there is insufficient emphasis on using new words in talking and writing in all other lessons across the curriculum.

- Teachers support pupils to make good progress in their mathematical understanding and skills. However, they do not place enough emphasis on the development of mathematical reasoning. Consequently, this aspect of their development does not improve fast enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. It provides for a variety of extremely vulnerable pupils, all of whom have education, health and care plans. The decision by leaders to refer to this as a college, not a school, is based on the fact that pupils have had such difficult experiences of all schools. Consequently, they are able to persuade pupils that they will have a different experience at Norton College.
- The strong ethos of welcome to all pupils is the major aspect of the school's drive to nurture and support pupils. The vast majority of pupils have catastrophic experiences of education before they arrive at Norton College. Many of them have been moved from school to school, as many as ten schools in some cases. This has been because those schools could not cope with their challenging and sometimes dangerous behaviour. Other pupils have become so anxious that they have developed agoraphobia and are unable to leave their homes.
- The powerful school ethos of kindness and warmth along with compassion begins with a smile, a handshake and a welcome every morning for every pupil. All discussions with pupils are based on positive interactions. Where there are emotional outbursts all adults are highly skilled to de-escalate problems and to find a way to support pupils to make reparations. The efficiency of the pastoral manager and his team ensures that staff are always aware of possible difficulties with pupils before they occur. They can support each other and the pupils. As a result, pupils quickly begin to develop trust in the staff and confidence in themselves. They learn to self-regulate. Older pupils spoken to showed great confidence when talking to visitors.
- An experienced member of the pastoral care team is a qualified mental health first aider. He is supported by a previous pupil who has undergone an apprenticeship at the school and has a teaching assistant qualification. They also guide pupils to use an online resource for mental health support. Consequently, pupils have someone to support them with mental health issues. They are able to talk to either one of them when the need arises. This support contributes to their developing confidence.
- All pupils are assessed against five 'character building' areas for learning. This highlights their areas of strength and indicates target areas for staff to work on with them. Areas assessed are: being reflective, being ready to learn, being a resourceful learner, being a responsible learner and being resilient. Pupils are aware of their progress on these scales and, as a result, are motivated by their successes.

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural teaching supports pupils to develop their relationships and understanding of the local community and the wider world. They can talk about differences between people and have a good understanding of equalities. One pupil said 'You have to treat everyone how you want to be treated. It is like not judging a book by its cover.'
- A long wide corridor in the school is painted white and inscribed with boldly written inspirational statements, for example: 'Destiny is not a matter of chance it is a matter of choice', 'Gain respect. Show the best version of you.' All staff are trained to teach personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). Every Friday, pupils have opportunities to volunteer to help around the school in a variety of ways. Consequently, they have a good understanding of how to help others.
- There are several places in the school where pupils feel happy to relax and have conversations with pastoral staff. One of these areas is the spacious kitchen. Pupils come into the kitchen for their cookery lessons but also to have a snack and a sit down. Newspapers on the table encourage them to talk about current news items with staff. One pupil who spoke to the inspector was extremely knowledgeable about 'Brexit' and the racial issues presented by the Windrush story. He said, 'I don't think anyone fully understands Brexit.' Staff make sure that pupils are given a balanced view of issues.
- Staff ensure that PSHE takes place in a relaxed situation where pupils feel confident to talk about issues that strongly affect their own lives. Consequently, pupils feel secure enough to listen and take part in informal discussion. They all say that they feel safe in school and they know how to keep themselves safe. They are fully aware of how to remain safe online. Because of their good knowledge of first aid, a group of pupils was able to give support to a person who was taken ill at a burger bar. They learn about healthy eating in their cooking lessons and know how to plan a healthy diet. They achieve certificates in healthy eating courses.
- Work with a wide range of external agencies supports pupils and helps to keep them safe. For example, the youth offending service, the fire service and the police visit the school to talk to groups of pupils and individuals if required. As a result, pupils are knowledgeable, for example about how the justice system works, about equalities and about life in modern Britain.
- High-quality careers advice and work experience are offered to all pupils. One of the assistant headteachers is a highly qualified careers adviser. All staff support pupils with the choices they make for the future. All pupils spoken to by the inspector had clear ideas about their preferences and future careers. Pupils have had experience of working, for example in supermarkets, skate parks and shops. Consequently, pupils have good experiences of the world of work.
- A variety of visits and external visitors extend pupils' knowledge of other religions. Pupils have visited a mosque and a local church. They are encouraged and supported to share their experiences of their different faiths within the school. A prayer room is available should any pupil wish to pray during the school day. As a result, they have an open attitude to people's different religions.
- Pupils from Norton College took part in an exciting national young enterprise project where they developed cosmetics and skin care products to advertise and to sell in, for example, the local church, a market stall in Worcester city centre and Norton village hall. To achieve this, pupils were involved in reading and research about safe cosmetics,

finding reputable suppliers and writing disclaimers, recipes and leaflets. Pupils also bought some products for family members as presents. As a result, they learned about the world of business. They showed their care for others in the wider world when donating some of the money to a charity of their choice.

- All pupils spoken to said that this school had changed their lives. They highly appreciate the warmth and friendliness of staff. They are aware that staff care for their well-being and want them to do well. A typical statement from a post-16 pupil was, 'Without this college I would not be succeeding in life as I am now.' Two younger pupils said, 'This is the best school ever!'
- Pupils have good opportunities for informal discussion with staff. However, they have few lessons where they develop their knowledge and skills in discussion and decision-making. As a result, they do not have enough opportunities to develop their knowledge of how democracy works in practice.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Every pupil shakes hands to greet visitors as they walk around the school. This is an expectation that prepares pupils very well for their future lives. It creates the ethos of warmth and welcome for all.
- The vast majority of pupils have good attendance. The welcoming ethos of the school ensures that the minority who attend less often improve their attendance quickly. This is also because members of the school pastoral team collect many of the pupils from home to ensure that they arrive on time. As a result, pupils feel cared for and are ready for lessons.
- A highly motivating system of reward for good behaviour and hard work involves payment at the end of each week. Pupils receive payment each week if they have, for example, worked hard in three English lessons and three mathematics lessons. They are paid for good behaviour and for other positive learning behaviours. They are able to save this money to buy items for themselves or for presents for family members. As a result, pupils are often highly motivated to achieve and they learn that hard work brings rewards.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school is outstanding. They are courteous and friendly and show respect and consideration for adults. Many of the older pupils are extremely keen to talk about how their behaviour has improved markedly. Because of this, their expectations in life have considerably widened.
- The school keeps detailed 'character building' records for each pupil. This means that they can reward those who are making more than expected progress. They can also pay close attention to those who need more support with their behaviour. The school's attitude to poor behaviour is that if something is not working they must try a different way. Pupils are always encouraged to make reparations. As a result, pupils' behaviour improves markedly as they stay longer at the school.
- Parents are extremely appreciative of the school. The marked improvement in their child's behaviour since starting at the school is reflected also at home.
- A large survey of visitors to the school was overwhelmingly positive about pupils' behaviour. A typical comment was, 'Fantastic college with extremely polite students and staff.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils are supported by education, health and care plans. All have made outstanding progress in their personal development. This includes pupils who are looked after by the local authority and those who have English as an additional language. This is because staff are highly skilled in the management of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They enable pupils to settle down quickly, feel secure and enjoy their learning.
- As pupils settle into school they begin to realise that adults care for them and want the best for them. The confidence they gain from this ensures that they become more and more able to self-regulate and concentrate on learning. They achieve qualifications and are able to take control of their own lives. The vast majority of pupils sustain this learning ability and go on to either employment or further education.
- The vast majority of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 have made good academic progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Some of them have made outstanding progress. This is because the accurate assessments made when the pupils arrive in the school are used to plan effective individualised learning programmes.
- Pupils take their functional skills examinations at a time when they feel confident. Many have already succeeded in passing at entry level and L1 and L2 in English and mathematics examinations. Pupils will be entered for further examinations this term, including a range of subjects at GCSE, including science and ICT.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in a range of vocational subjects. They achieve BTEC certificates in art, car mechanics, music, carpentry, building, cooking skills, sports and computer animation.
- Pupils leave the school for destinations where they can continue their education. Destinations for pupils who left in July 2017 were either to a place in college or to an apprenticeship. Many of them remain at Norton College for the sixth form.
- Pupils have frequent opportunities to improve their reading skills in lessons and good opportunities to enjoy reading. Some of the pupils enjoy reading for pleasure.

Sixth form provision

Good

- In line with the rest of the school, leadership of the sixth form is good. This is reflected in good-quality teaching, learning and assessment, as well as the outstanding support for students' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Safeguarding arrangements are extremely robust.
- Students are very well supported to make good progress by skilled teachers, instructors and the pastoral care team. They are given good careers advice and guidance and opportunities for work experience. Leaders take great care to ensure that the students have appropriate placements in further education or apprenticeships when they leave the school. Some previous students have taken up apprenticeships at Norton College, with subsequent employment by the college.
- Sixth-form students follow a similar curriculum to pupils in the rest of the school, with programmes focusing on essential skills in English, mathematics and ICT. Some of them

take GCSEs and BTEC qualifications, for example GCSE English and mathematics as well as, for example, BTEC computer animation or BTEC art or music. Previous pupils have taken GCSE engineering/electronics or business studies. Some present pupils have already secured places at art college, music college or sports college, starting in September 2018.

School details

Unique reference number	136262
DfE registration number	885/6040
Inspection number	10038845

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Mr Ian Hardicker
Chair	Edward Morris
Headteacher	Ian Hardicker
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,000
Telephone number	01905 359257
Website	www.nortoncollege.org.uk
Email address	Ian.Hardicker@nortoncollege.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 September–2 October 2014

Information about this school

- Norton College is an independent special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social needs. It opened in 2010 and is owned by Crucible Education Ltd. The school was last inspected in September to October 2014.
- The school's aim is to give the most challenged and challenging young people the sort of educational, social and vocational skills that will enable them to integrate into society.

- The school provides for up to 80 young people who are not attending mainstream secondary schools or, if over 16 years old, are not going to a mainstream sixth-form college full time. It is registered to take pupils between 11 and 19 years.
- The school uses the following alternative providers for some of its outdoor education activities: Acton Mill Care Farm, Wick Grange Care Farm, Bridge Training Centre (Gloucester) and Gloverspiece Minifarm.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds but a few are from minority ethnic groups. Twelve pupils are looked after by carers and the local authority.
- There are 79 boys and girls on roll. The pupils currently on roll are aged between 11 and 19 years of age. They all have a background of disrupted education. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Some pupils currently come from local vocational providers to take part in engineering and a range of recreational options aimed at widening their experiences.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five individual mathematics, English and ICT lessons and scrutinised a variety of pupils' books. She also observed a group cooking lesson as well as a group discussion lesson and conducted a learning walk to look at individual carpentry, art, music, science and computer animation lessons.
- The inspector made observations of pupils as they moved about the school and as they had informal conversations with members of staff.
- The inspector held meetings with the chair of the directors, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the three assistant headteachers and the pastoral care manager. She also held a meeting with four members of staff and with a parent who came to the school.
- The inspector scrutinised schemes of work and lesson plans as well as a variety of documents about pupils and safeguarding. She scrutinised risk assessments about the school building, individual pupils and external visits.
- The inspector toured the school premises.
- The inspector spoke to several parents on the telephone and several of the pupils.
- The inspector took into account 67 visitors' questionnaires, 26 staff questionnaire responses and 11 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View.
- The inspector spoke on the telephone to three members of local authorities who place pupils in the school.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
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