

1 November 2007

Mr D McPartlin  
Ken Stimpson Community School  
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Dear Mr McPartlin

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 31 October 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils I met with in Years 7, 9 and 11 for sharing their views on teaching and learning.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 January 2007, the school was asked to consistently improve pupils' progress from ages 11 to 16 by:

- involving pupils more in active learning in lessons
- ensuring that assessment and marking procedures help pupils to progress
- increasing the proportion of good or better teaching and learning through self-evaluation and quality assurance activities.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' attainment. Substantial building work was disrupting some lessons and challenging the leadership team's capacity to focus on monitoring and self-evaluation; this has been completed. Pupil numbers and staffing have significantly increased following the closure of some local secondary schools. Expansion of the leadership team and the inclusion of middle managers in self-evaluation activities have improved the school's capacity to focus more sharply on arresting the decline in standards.

Pupils' achievement has improved because they are making better progress in relation to relatively challenging targets. The dip in standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 has been successfully corrected. The 2007 Key Stage 3 national test results are the best ever; pupils made satisfactory progress from their relative starting points to reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science. The proportion

of pupils achieving 5 or more A\* - C in GCSE has improved by 8.3%, bringing standards in Key Stage 4 closer to the national average. Pupils' underperformance in information and communication technology is being tackled effectively under new leadership. The focus on the specialist Business and Enterprise (B&E) status with increased specialist resourcing in business and related subjects has had a beneficial impact on pupils' progress. Nonetheless, despite these welcome improvements, not all targets set for 2007 were met, especially by boys of middle or high ability in Key Stage 4.

The quality of teaching is improving because the leadership team have rightly focused on helping staff develop the quality of their planning and lesson activities. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored by the leadership team and middle managers with clear expectations for performance. Adoption of the 'Ken Stimpson Community School lesson' with set components and transparent criteria for success has improved consistency in teaching and learning. Assessment information is used to plan the next steps in learning and to track progress; most strategies to tackle underachievement are effective, but the most able learners remain insufficiently challenged in lessons. Work seen in books confirms that teachers conform to the new marking policy, although there is variation in the quality of the guidance given. Teachers promptly praise good behaviour creating a positive climate for learning that pupils appreciate. Strategies to generate active pupil participation were seen in some lessons. Lesson objectives vary in precision but are universally shared with pupils at the start of lessons. The pupils say that lessons are more interesting and the sharing of lesson objectives helps them to make better progress.

All staff have embraced the effective support given by the local authority, external consultants and agencies; they are energetically driving forward the improvement agenda with goodwill and professionalism. The leadership teams' and middle managers' revised roles and responsibilities are linked to raising standards and improving self-evaluation. A recently introduced record of improvement with self-evaluation at the core is increasing the rigour of quality assurance activities. Senior and middle managers undertake paired observations, strengthening their resolve to make accurate judgements and to act on outcomes. This is work in progress and they are still developing their expertise in making clear, unambiguous judgements about teaching and learning. Nonetheless, the percentage of good teaching is steadily rising and outcomes for learners are improving. The regular sharing of good practice enables faculties to learn from each other to raise their performance.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman

Her Majesty's Inspector