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Mr D McPartlin
Principal
Ken Stimpson Community School
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Dear Mr McPartlin

Ofsted survey programme visit - National Strategies survey 2008-09

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Jane Joyner HMI on 08 December 2008 to look at the impact of the National Strategies on raising standards and narrowing the attainment gap.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit focused on the work of the National Strategies in improving outcomes for children and young people. The visit focused particularly on the school's view of the impact of the National Strategies and how this is evaluated.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual schools will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the outcomes of the visit included interviews with the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal, other senior staff, teachers and two groups of pupils. Inspectors observed four part-lessons and scrutinised relevant documentation.

Senior leaders consider that the National Strategies' focus on improving teaching has raised the profile of teaching styles which actively engage students in learning and have led to a greater consistency in classroom practice across the school. However, they report and inspectors agree that it is difficult to disaggregate the effect of separate initiatives being implemented simultaneously.

The visit provided evidence from lesson observations that teachers are planning activities which engage students in their learning, for example, practical work in science and opportunities to work and share ideas in pairs or small groups. Whilst senior leaders say that teaching overall has improved, practice is not consistent across the school: in two of the lessons observed behaviour was not managed well so the progress of too many students was limited. Students say that the variability in the approach used by teachers to manage behaviour in lessons can be confusing. Only one lesson observed by inspectors made good use of assessment for learning and there were missed opportunities to develop students' literacy skills.

The school has welcomed guidance from the National Strategies and the considerable number of consultant visits since January 2007. However, this support has yet to have an impact on the progress of students leaving at the end of Year 11 and is not reflected in an improved pattern of achievement during the period 2005 - 2008. Whilst standards rose in 2008, the overall progress made by 16 year olds relative to their attainment on entry to the school has declined since 2005, most notably in English. In 2007 students' progress at the end of Key Stage 4 placed the school in the lowest 5% of all schools nationally. The provisional data for 2008 shows the same picture.

More robust evaluation of the impact of interventions is necessary if the school is to sustain the improvement seen at the inspection in February 2008.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector