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Richard Lord
Principal
Ken Stimpson Community School
Staniland Way
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Dear Mr Lord

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with the additional inspectors Meg Hackney and Alan Brewerton, on 25 February 2010. We would like to thank you in particular for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on our thanks to the staff, pupils, governors and external partners who met with us during the inspection.

You took over as Acting Principal in September 2009 following your predecessor's resignation. Other members of the leadership team took on acting roles and the leadership responsibilities were redefined. You were appointed as Principal, against external competition, earlier this month. The school is now advertising for a Vice-Principal. In the last year, a change of policy has trebled the number of pupils being recorded as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this does not reflect the true incidence of special educational needs in the school, which is significantly lower.

As a result of the inspection on 25–26 February 2008, the school was asked to: increase the proportion of students gaining higher grades in the GCSE examinations; improve teaching, assessment and feedback to students; and to improve the consistency of behaviour management in lessons.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

At the time of the last inspection, the school had recently admitted around 40 pupils into its Year 10, following local school reorganisation. Several of these pupils were recent arrivals to this country and several more had been persistent absentees at



their previous schools. Integrating these pupils and meeting their needs presented the school with a major challenge and affected the GCSE results in 2009.

The proportion of pupils gaining at least five GCSE passes at grade C, including English and mathematics, improved in 2008 but fell back in 2009. This represented inadequate progress from the pupils' starting points in Year 7. However, the great majority of current pupils are making much better progress and their attainment is now above the national average. This is evident from the school's own assessment records and also from the learning and progress evident in the lessons observed during this inspection. Progress in this area for improvement is therefore satisfactory.

Achievement among current pupils is therefore better than it was in the previous two years. There are four main reasons for this improvement. The school has made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and the consistency of behaviour management. It has also enhanced the curriculum and improved its monitoring systems. These changes provide evidence that the school now has a better capacity to sustain further improvement.

The improvements in teaching are evident from lesson observations carried out by senior leaders in March and November 2009. Support from the local authority and other partners has helped to increase the proportion of good lessons and reduce the frequency of inadequate teaching. The school has joined with others locally in a collaborative monitoring programme, whereby senior leaders observe lessons in each others' schools, both to share expertise and to validate their judgements. However, the school has made inadequate progress in improving the quality of marking and feedback to pupils. When inspectors talked to pupils and checked their books, it was apparent that many are still not getting clear guidance. Marking is rarely diagnostic and provides little information to pupils on how to improve their work. Some books are not marked regularly enough.

The school has revised its behaviour management strategies to satisfactory effect. It has joined in the national Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme and pupils now have more opportunities to take on responsibility. Disruptive behaviour is less evident, but still slows progress in some lessons, particularly where the teaching is unimaginative. There is still some inconsistency in behaviour management, with a few teachers allowing noise levels to rise unacceptably.

The improved curriculum allows pupils to follow academic or vocational pathways, or a mixture of the two. Practical learning courses and young apprenticeships are now offered in conjunction with a local college. The school also provides a course in English for speakers of other languages. The school's Business and Enterprise specialism is reflected in the new courses offered in business studies, statistics and information and communication technology. However, a few pupils on alternative learning programmes still do not take GCSEs in English or mathematics.



The school's improved monitoring of pupils' progress has had two benefits. One is that class teachers and subject leaders can be held directly to account for pupils' progress. The school is developing its capacity for improvement through regular meetings between senior leaders and heads of faculties, with an emphasis on more ambitious targets. The other benefit is that underachieving pupils are identified sooner, allowing the school to target academic support more effectively to help them catch up. Following external advice, the school has been counting pupils who receive this support in the special educational needs categories of 'school action' or 'school action plus', resulting in the three-fold increase referred to above. Most of the pupils concerned, however, do not have identified special educational needs that warrant inclusion in these categories and designating them as such is inappropriate. The progress made by such pupils in the last Year 11, as measured by the contextual value added scores, would have been lower if a more accurate assessment of special educational needs had been made.

The school maintains a single central record of its checks on the suitability of staff. While the required information is all present, the format should be revised to make it easier for you to take responsibility for its completeness and accuracy.

The school has received satisfactory support from the local authority and other external partners. However, the local authority has not provided a satisfactory challenge to the school's inappropriate recording of special educational needs.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

