

Serco
Boundary House
2, Wythall Green Way
Wythall
Birmingham
West Midlands
B47 6LW

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 2843
Beverley.joyner@serco.com



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Miss R Poppleton
Nether Stowe School
St Chad's Road
Lichfield
Staffordshire
WS13 7NB

Dear Miss Poppleton

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 27 January 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. We are also grateful to your staff and students for the welcome they gave us and the willingness with which they engaged in discussions. I would particularly like to thank those students who gave up their lunchtime to meet with me.

Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has undergone considerable change. The headteacher joined the school in January 2009, one of the assistant headteachers took up post in April 2009 and one in September 2009. There have also been some staff changes. These are now resolved with specialist staff for all the main subjects as for example in the mathematics department.

As a result of the inspection of 30-31 January 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 by ensuring intervention strategies are robust and show sufficient impact, and
- share good practice to ensure that more teaching is good or outstanding and that a range of stimulating tasks and resources cater for the full range of pupil abilities.

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.



The headteacher has worked closely with the senior leadership team to establish a clear understanding about what the school needs to do to improve. Each member of the senior leadership team has played a full part in this process, including participating in lesson observations, analysing of planning and scrutinising students' work. This approach has been used very effectively to establish, for example, a consistent system of developmental marking. The guidance that the students receive, as a result, is contributing to the improved progress seen in writing throughout the school. Although these activities have been carried out by more than one member of staff, appropriate moderation processes have been built into this work so that staff benefit from each other's expertise. The school recognises, however, that middle leaders must work together more effectively to remove variation in the performance between subjects by ensuring the more consistent use of best practice and in reviewing and evaluating the work of their departments. This is particularly so in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, and setting of appropriate challenging and realistic targets for improvement. The school also recognises that it needs now to focus more sharply on the impact of teaching on students' learning.

The school has clearly demonstrated that it is capable of addressing the shortcomings identified in the last inspection. The effectiveness of the school's work is evident in the improved progress seen in students' learning at all ages. However, the trend in students' attainment over the last three years has been uneven. The school increased the proportion of students achieving five or more grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, to 46% in 2009. However, within this generally positive picture, results in English have been disappointing. The school has responded quickly and a detailed intervention plan has been implemented to raise attainment in English and mathematics. Preparation for tests and examinations has assumed a higher priority, with some students starting their exams in Year 10. Students are more aware of their targets and the progress they are making. Meetings are held regularly to review progress and to identify groups for intervention, particularly in English and mathematics. Lesson observations carried out jointly with the senior leadership team indicate that students in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress. The school has a clear view of each student's starting point and their current levels. Leaders are now in the position to be able to analyse the data as it comes in to see how well students are progressing. Projections indicate that the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grade, including English and mathematics, will be 50% in 2010 and 65% in 2011. Specialist status in mathematics and computing is beginning to impact more widely across the school. This is particularly so in information and communication and technology (ICT) because of the recent investment in the purchase of computers and interactive whiteboards.

The school has received an appropriate level of support from the local authority, for example by advisory staff undertaking joint lesson observations. This has contributed to the professional development of key staff and helped to confirm the accuracy of their judgements, as well as those of other senior leaders.

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
Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector