

11 July 2007

Mr John Daulby
Headteacher
John Smeaton Community High School
Smeaton Approach
Barwick Road
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS15 8TA

Dear Mr Daulby

Ofsted Monitoring of Schools with Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when we inspected your school on 10 July 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during our visit. Please pass on our thanks to all the staff involved in the visit with particular thanks to the students that we met at lunchtime.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 6 and 7 December 2006, the school was asked to:

- Raise pupils attainment in all key stages, particularly in English, mathematics and science
- Teach pupils the basic skills that enable them to be successful learners
- Improve the quality of teaching by increasing the range of activities that engage and motivate pupils to learn
- Further improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence we are of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

The school has already received the results of the 2007 Key Stage 3 national tests in mathematics and science and they show that attainment has improved. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above has risen from 49% in 2006 to 54% this year and the proportion of pupils at Level 6 or above has risen by 6%. In science, the proportion of pupils at Level 5 or above has risen from 39% to 55% and the proportion reaching Level 6 or above has risen by 9%. The improvement in science is partly due to work that has been done to raise literacy

skills, which has developed pupils' ability to read, understand and answer questions. The English results are not currently available but the indications are that they will show a similar improvement. At Key Stage 4, a number of pupils have successfully completed and passed vocational qualifications and others obtained GCSE passes in Year 10. Before the 2007 GCSE results become fully available, the school knows that the proportion of Year 11 pupils who have obtained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is higher than last year. In 2006, 36% of Year 11 pupils gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C compared with 43% already this year. Standards are still below average but they are rising and pupils are making better progress in Key Stage 3 and 4. In the sixth form, there are indications that standards will also rise.

The quality of teaching and learning is improving. Although the gap between the quality of teaching and progress made by pupils persists, it is closing because of the close attention paid by teachers to developing skills required for learning. The momentum of improvement is accelerating as systems and structures become embedded and teachers gain the confidence to make the necessary changes in their practice to enable pupils to achieve as well as they should. Carefully planned activities promote the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills more routinely in lessons. Consequently, they are gaining the confidence to participate more actively in their learning. Pupils report that they are more involved in their lessons and enjoy working together in groups or independently. For example, during the visit, a group of Year 8 pupils were engaged in lively discussion about the choice of photographs to use in a presentation about the transition of their school from the current site to the new buildings in September.

The school's rigorous self-evaluation procedures have provided senior and middle leaders with a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. This has informed a comprehensive whole-school programme of professional development for teachers to focus on the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. In addition, the needs of individual teachers are met through personalised support to tackle specific areas for development. Middle leaders play an increasing role in the self-evaluation process and contribute more confidently to the monitoring and evaluation of their subject area. A range of strategies introduced by senior leaders has been used effectively to develop the teaching styles that will meet best the needs of all pupils. Teachers use forum meetings and coaching groups to share and develop best practice. Outcomes of monitoring by middle leaders reflect the positive impact of training on pupils' experiences in the classroom. Lessons are generally well planned, with a variety of activities that engage and sustain the interest of pupils more readily. Consequently pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate. In less effective lessons, teachers still talk for too long and activities are not all matched appropriately to the pupils' needs.

Attendance is improving steadily. The latest figure for the average attendance since September is very close to this year's target of 88%. The school has implemented a very wide range of strategies to monitor attendance and discourage pupils from

missing lessons. There are regular rewards for good attendance, including a weekly prize for the tutor group in each year with the best overall attendance and a weekly prize draw for pupils with 100% attendance. The prizes are awarded in assembly and are regular reminders of the importance of regular attendance. A multi-agency support team is working very closely with individual pupils to improve their attendance. Any unauthorised absence is followed up immediately with parents or carers and the value of regular attendance is actively promoted at parents' evenings. An 'attend and achieve' project targeting those with poor attendance in Years 9 and 11 has been successful in reducing the number of absences of 76% of those pupils involved. Attendance data are collected and analysed regularly in order to identify patterns of absence that can be investigated and addressed. The school has also worked hard to improve attendance at external examinations by offering refreshments and support between examinations. Over the last two years, the attendance at Key Stage 3 mathematics and science examinations has improved by more than 10%, and by almost 20% for English.

Care and support have been strengthened further; this has been a key factor in bringing about improvements. Academic and pastoral staff work together more closely, and information about individual pupils is shared more effectively. Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been strengthened, enabling teachers and the multi-agency support team to respond more quickly to the needs of individuals.

The local authority's initial statement of action was unsatisfactory but it has been amended and improved. The school has received good support from local authority subject advisers and consultants; they have worked closely with the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly at Key Stage 3.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jan Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector