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5 February 2013

Mr G Schofield
Irk Valley Community School
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Manchester
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Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Irk Valley Community School.

Dear Mr Schofield

Following my visit to your school on 5 February 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders and representatives of the Governing Body and of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including records of feedback given to staff after lesson observations, information from the school's systems for tracking and assessing pupils' progress and evaluating the school's performance. A small sample of pupils' work across classes and subjects was also scrutinised and a brief learning walk was made with the headteacher.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection that judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

The school improvement plan has been revised to provide a stronger focus on addressing the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. The plan includes appropriate actions and intentions. However, these are not always explicitly linked to very precise outcomes for pupils, especially those groups and individuals at risk of underachieving. Although timescales for checking the progress of the school's actions are identified, these checks need to be more frequent, to give earlier warnings of underperformance and allow prompt action to be taken.

Since the last inspection several policies have been updated and staff have benefited from external training, for example on improving pupils' writing skills. This is beginning to show early impact on pupils' work. The school has a reasonably robust system for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets for improvement, but the information from these systems is not consistently well used by all staff or governors to pre-empt underachievement.

Senior leaders regularly check the work of staff and provide them with feedback on it. However, their feedback does not always focus on how well different groups of pupils are learning. Middle leaders have recently been involved in scrutinising pupils' work and this has helped them to perceive gaps in the school's performance. Recent appointments at both middle and senior level show good capacity to drive improvement further, if given the scope to do so.

Members of the governing body met during the inspection are enthusiastic and keen for the school to improve. They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and of some of the actions that need to be taken in order for the school to become good. Nevertheless, governors are not yet fully involved in planning or evaluating the work of the school and know that they need further training in order to discharge fully their role in holding the school to account.

Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- make sure that the school improvement plan clearly specifies:
 - how governors will be involved in evaluating the impact of the school's actions
 - exactly what the impact of the school's action will be on the learning of all pupils, but especially those at risk of underachieving
- ensure that feedback to teachers focuses on the achievement of different groups of pupils
- work with the local authority in order to further strengthen the role of the governing body.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have provided effective support from a quality assurance advisor and linked the school with a National Leader of Education, in order to help the school to continue improving. There is further scope for the local authority to provide training for the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector