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Mr Simon Bramwell
Executive Headteacher
Irk Valley Community School
10 Waterloo Street
Lower Crumpsall
Manchester
Greater Manchester
M8 5XH

Dear Mr Bramwell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Irk Valley Community School, Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 6 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 second 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.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. I am of the opinion that the school's next inspection should be a full Section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held to discuss the actions you have taken since the last inspection. I met with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor. I also met a representative of the local authority. A range of documents was considered during the visit, including assessment information, the school self-evaluation document, records of the outcomes of monitoring activities and of the impact of performance management. Short visits were made to classrooms to observe, jointly with you and your senior leaders, the quality of teaching currently provided in the school. During these lessons I talked with pupils to discuss briefly their written work and their views about

the school. I checked the Single Central Record and confirmed that all new staff since my last visit were included.

Context

The nine months since your appointment as Executive headteacher have been a period of considerable change at the school, including role changes at senior leadership level and the appointment of a new member of staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage. You will continue in your post until September 2015.

Main findings

Since my last visit the school has made significant further progress against all the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection report.

Current assessment information from your robust new tracking systems points to improved attainment and progress for almost all groups of pupils currently in school. You and the whole staff have worked determinedly to ready pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage for the more challenging expectations of them in Key Stage 1. This has contributed to standards in Key Stage 1 that are set to rise above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics by summer 2014.

Year 6 pupils are on track to exceed national measures of attainment, for example at level L4+ and Level 5+ in reading and writing and in spelling, punctuation and grammar. This marks rapid improvement of the 2013 national test results. The proportion of pupils who are currently achieving Level 5+ in mathematics is below national expectations but the school has organised daily breakfast clubs followed by mathematics lessons in smaller teaching groups to ensure that pupils reach the national expectation by the time of the 2014 national tests. More rigorous internal and external moderation of pupils' work is contributing to these rapidly improving standards. Regular pupil progress meetings hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement increasingly effectively.

Pupils eligible for the pupil premium achieve at least as well as, and often better than, other pupils in the school and all pupils nationally. The achievement of most pupils who have a disability or special educational needs (DSEN) is broadly in line with that of their peers. The school has recognised that there is some variation in the achievement of a small number of particular groups of pupils who have DSEN. A new Special Needs Coordinator has recently been recruited and the identification of pupils with DSEN and the ensuing Individual Education Plans are already much sharper.

You made a considerable investment in the improvement of the quality of teaching. Your own records show teaching over time to be consistently at least good and this is confirmed by external evaluations. Systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are much stronger. Staff also have more opportunities to exchange

good practice within the school and to see outstanding teaching in other schools, including your own. The small sample of teaching seen on my visit was shown to support pupils' good learning overall. However a few pupils could have achieved more in the time available and would have benefited from more opportunities to contribute their own ideas during activities. Marking is generally detailed and explains clearly what pupils need to do to improve their work. A strong focus on the improvement of writing is having a clear impact on pupils' progress in writing across the school.

Pupils' behaviour is very good in classrooms and around the school and relationships in lessons are very strong. Pupils are generally confident to take the initiative in talking with each other and with adults, which is impressive given their linguistic starting points. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and take great pride in the presentation of their written work.

Leadership and management are greatly improved. Everything that the school does is underpinned by a strong commitment to improving outcomes for pupils and expectations are high. This vision is evident amongst all staff that I met.

You have galvanised the staff by changing roles and responsibilities to ensure that all staff are in positions where they can be most effective. The skills of senior leaders have matured through high quality coaching and mentoring and they now hold a wider and more accurate perspective on the school's performance. Middle leaders are much more confident to challenge underperformance in their teams because you have given them space and time to strengthen their skills. Staff appreciate the improved access to professional development, for example, by sharing good practice and see outstanding practice in other schools. Improvement planning is incisive and thorough, supporting the understanding, at all levels, of key priorities for the school. Governors were quick to undertake a review of their own practice after the last inspection. Consequently they now insist on receiving much more sophisticated information and know how to test the reliability of such information independently. This allows them to discuss knowledgeably the progress of key pupil groups within the school, for example those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. They are well equipped to ask challenging questions of senior leaders. Governors are rightly proud of their role in school improvement.

External support

The local authority supports the school's improvement by funding regular contact with their quality assurance officer to validate the school's own self-evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector