

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Jason Fraser  
Principal  
Sir William Stanier Community School  
Coronation Street  
Crewe  
Cheshire  
CW1 4EB

Dear Mr Fraser

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sir William Stanier Community School**

Following my visit to your school on 30 June 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the Heath Family North West Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the senior leadership team and the executive principal who represents the trust. I also made telephone calls to the school's improvement adviser with whom the school works in partnership, the chair of the governing body and a local authority officer, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You took me on a guided tour of the school with an assistant principal. I also met separately with a range of staff and pupils with whom I discussed the work of the school. I spent some time observing pupils' learning and behaviour in a small number of lessons and I also observed

their behaviour during social times. I examined the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, and records related to pupils' behaviour, achievement, attendance and exclusions. I also considered various documents detailing the school's actions, initiatives and progress in responding to the areas for improvement identified at the school's last inspection.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, four governors have joined the governing body. A number of staff have left: three English teachers, a design and technology teacher, a geography teacher, a music teacher, an information technology teacher and three staff from the STAR academy (now rebranded as the 'Aspire' academy). Eight support staff in varying roles have also left the school. You have ensured that the school is fully staffed for September 2016 in all subjects.

## **Main findings**

Since the February inspection, you have astutely reflected on your staffing structure to strengthen leadership and have reorganised the responsibilities of members of the senior and middle leadership team. The former assistant principal in charge of teaching and learning has changed role and is now head of science. Both vice-principals are changing roles to make best use of their skills and experience. Leadership across the school is streamlined and tightly focused so that roles are linked to the strengths of individual leaders. This means that senior leaders are more able to drive forward the school improvement plans.

Governance has been enriched with the addition of four governors who bring enhanced skills and experience in school leadership. Governors are now engaging with a national leader of governance to refine and sharpen aspects of the work of the governing body.

You have taken swift action to tackle the areas identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection. You have made an accurate evaluation of the school and, using the strengthened leadership team, you are now better able to drive improvements and raise standards throughout the school. You are keen to give opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills across the school, and the newly appointed associate leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and objectives. The work of the leadership team is now more sharply focused, and its members have the skills and expertise to take the school forward. Leaders are working at pace to ensure that action is taken in the key areas for improvement across the school. Leaders show a passion for improving the lives of pupils.

You are steering the school through the significant changes that are required to bring about sustained improvement. You are clear that staffing changes have been the consequence of clear actions to challenge underperformance, alongside some staff moving for promotional appointments and a need to improve the financial

stability of the school. The school improvement plan is well written and sensibly identifies key actions, which aim to secure improvement during this academic year. It is clear who will lead each improvement initiative and how you plan to evaluate the success of these. Importantly, you and your leaders have wasted no time in setting the school on its journey towards providing pupils with a good standard of education.

You have a clear picture of pupils' achievements throughout the school and understand the actions needed to secure improvements. Leaders check pupils' progress carefully and intervene rapidly if there is any hint of underachievement. Staff and leaders are working together to ensure that pupils' achievement improves across the school and that standards rise. The trust is influential and well informed. You ensure that it is provided with frequent reports about the school's performance. It provides you with the right tools to 'grasp the nettle' and secure rapid improvements.

To improve the quality of learning, leaders have wisely focused on ensuring that support for all pupils is tailored to individuals' needs using a good practice framework. Teachers are now using information on what pupils know and understand to support their learning, better meeting their needs. As a result, there have been improvements in pupils' achievement. There is now a much more analytical approach to checking the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers receive feedback on what works well and what needs to improve. The vice-principal has a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching throughout the school and is now extending opportunities for teachers' professional development to raise performance. Staff development is a priority and staff value the highly structured programme on offer. Support is provided to some staff through effective mentoring and coaching. Areas for improvement are incorporated into teachers' performance management targets.

Senior leaders have altered the marking policy to ensure that the purpose of marking is understood by all staff, and that teachers' marking has a direct impact on improving pupils' learning. The most able pupils are now following a clear programme of enrichment and support. Leaders have a spotlight on the most able and are supporting pupils with a wider number of initiatives and activities. The most able are deepening their critical-thinking skills and having their resilience and aspirations supported by a local university. Leaders have an unwavering focus on raising pupils' expectations, attitudes and aspirations. As a result, the most able pupils are beginning to make better progress.

During this visit, pupils presented themselves as smartly dressed and purposeful. Early indications suggest that their attitudes to learning are improving in response to the launch of new systems and to the improved quality of teaching. Evidence gathered during this visit confirms your view that the introduction of a new system to improve pupils' attitudes to learning is transforming behaviour. During our learning walk, I observed that the vast majority of pupils were calm, engrossed in

their learning and respectful towards one another and their teachers. My observations of pupils during social times confirmed the improved attitudes and good conduct of pupils. Staff report that the new policy is supporting a new learning culture across the school.

New displays promoting the importance of leadership and celebrating success are starting to have an impact, improving the culture and building community cohesion across the school. Staff and pupils have been updated and refocused on the importance of building strong relationships and the need to raise standards. Behaviour is swiftly improving throughout the school. This is evident in the reductions in the proportion of pupils temporarily excluded from school and in the number of pupils being removed from lessons because of poor behaviour. Pupils are categorical in their praise for the changes that leaders have brought about since February. Pupils made very few negative comments about school. They say it is changing for the better. Comments made by parents attending parents' evenings demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of parents share the view that pupils' behaviour and uniform standards are improving. Many are happy with the work of leaders and the direction that the school is taking.

You have rightly highlighted to pupils the importance of improving attendance. Leaders use well-organised systems in their quest to improve attendance so that it becomes closer to national averages. You recognise the need to strengthen processes, including through the use of a new parent liaison officer and also by reviewing and sharpening the use of the education welfare services.

The Aspire academy is steered carefully by new astute leadership and improved teaching. This is ensuring improved attitudes and a trend of increased attendance and rapidly reducing exclusions. Leaders have restructured lessons and curriculum delivery to give pupils the best opportunities to be successful. Appropriate rewards are built into the curriculum leading to weekly 'golden time' where pupils have the opportunity to enjoy further enrichment activities, including cooking. There has also been a stronger focus on securing appropriate educational provision for pupils to attend when they leave the school. Good connections have been established with a post-16 provider to ensure that pupils remain in education, training or employment.

### **External support**

Leaders and the trust are confident in the strategic direction that the school is taking. The school is drawing on external support well. The trust has provided welcome and focused support with frequent visits from a commissioned school improvement partner and also through a number of specialist leaders of education. The trust has ensured that teachers and leaders can access funds and training that are related to the school improvement plans. The school regularly draws on support from other school leaders within the trust. The executive principal holds fortnightly leadership meetings with the principal, ensuring 'no stone goes unturned' and that all leaders are held accountable in their drive towards improving standards. The

local authority works closely with the school in ensuring that local community cohesion improves, and that local issues affecting the school are stabilised, reducing the effect on pupils within the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**