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Mrs Elaine Darwin
Headteacher
Irlam Primary School
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Dear Mrs Darwin

Short inspection of Irlam Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection. There has been a change in the leadership of the school since then. You became headteacher in September 2015, having previously been the deputy headteacher, and you created a new senior leadership team, appointing two existing members of staff to be your assistant headteachers.

You reinstated the school's partnership with the adviser from the local authority and, with her effective support, began a programme of development, aiming to ensure a clearer focus on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report.

This programme has been effective. As a result of stronger teaching, pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved, as is evident in recently published assessment information and the school's own information. We agreed that the teachers in the early years could provide better opportunities for children to develop their number and calculation skills.

You have made your processes for checking the quality of teaching and managing teachers' performance more robust. This has contributed well to the growing strength in teaching. You have challenged underperformance among some members of staff. Almost all have embraced the recommendations for improvement you gave and have made positive changes to their practice. You also have a clearer and more accurate process for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, which gives

leaders a better picture of pupils' achievement across the school. Regular pupil progress meetings enable you and your leadership team to hold teachers to account and to make sure that pupils who need extra support receive it. Teachers in the early years, as we agreed, should now develop sharper questioning to make sure children make as much progress as they can.

You were not content merely to address the issues raised at the last inspection. You have, for example, recently analysed the published assessment information for 2016 and have drawn up an action plan to tackle the weaker areas of achievement that the information indicated. As a result, evidence in pupils' work and in your own assessment information shows that there is improved progress in the early years, particularly for boys, in writing. Progress in reading and writing in key stages 1 and 2 is now good.

Although most of your plan contains appropriate actions with statements about how you will evaluate their effectiveness, some parts are less precise and do not focus as sharply on the impact on pupils' achievement. As we agreed, you should now consider a plan to address the omissions from the school's website and ensure it remains compliant. In addition, a next step in improvement is to raise pupils' attendance, especially for pupils who receive free school meals and those who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

A large majority of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were positive about the quality of education the school provides for their children. They feel that the school has moved on in the last two years, with parents typically commenting that you have done a 'fantastic job' since you took over as headteacher. They said that their children 'absolutely love coming to school' and all the parents who responded would recommend the school to others.

The group of Year 6 pupils with whom I met were also positive about their experiences in school. They enjoy coming to school and say that the adults look after them well. They enjoy the range of extra-curricular clubs you provide, such as dance, football and choir and they spoke enthusiastically about the fundraising they do for various charities. They were especially complimentary about you, making comments such as 'The school wouldn't be as good if Mrs Darwin wasn't here.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have an electronic system that you use to record all safeguarding concerns thoroughly and you respond promptly, following up concerns with outside agencies when required.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You and your staff care deeply for your pupils, while your pupils and their parents know they can rely on you and your staff if they have any worries. Pupils understand about different forms of bullying and know how to stay safe, including when they are on the internet. This is because staff effectively provide pupils with the information they need.

Inspection findings

- I followed a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection, which I shared with you at the beginning of the day. One of these concerned addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, on which I have already reported in this letter.
- Evidence from children's work and from your own assessment information shows that current children in the early years make good progress, with boys in particular showing notable improvement in their achievement in writing. Pupil premium funding is being used to good effect to support speech and language development for those you have identified as needing it. However, you acknowledged that there were fewer opportunities in the setting for children to develop their mathematics skills independently than there were for writing. You also accepted that sometimes staff missed the chance to deepen children's learning by asking targeted questions. For example, a group of children who were playing with water and containers did not get the opportunity to develop their understanding of, for example, capacity because staff did not ask them questions that allowed them to think about it.
- Pupils in key stage 1 make good progress in reading and writing. Evidence from pupils' work shows that they are acquiring the appropriate reading skills well. In writing in Year 2, pupils show increasing ability to use more complex sentence structures. Most-able pupils can write sentences such as, 'I think that this story is set in a jungle because there is a lot of trees in the picture', showing improving control and more advanced structure, and they can use more adventurous vocabulary, such as, 'The boy feels terrified.'
- In reading and writing in key stage 2, pupils make good progress. In reading, Year 6 pupils develop their skills well in inferring meaning from the text, such as correctly finding clues to establish whether a character is old or young. Year 4 pupils make good progress in writing and can use interesting sentences and phrases to engage the reader, such as 'the crowd howled with laughter' and 'purple with rage'.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Leaders use funding effectively to support identified pupils by, for example, deploying teaching assistants to give them extra help in developing their English skills. In writing in Year 5, for instance, pupils develop ambitious vocabulary and sophisticated phrasing, such as 'Jim was motionless, too afraid to even breathe.'
- Leaders, including governors, understand their statutory responsibilities, although there are some omissions from the school's website connected with information about the curriculum. Leaders are aware of these and are taking steps to rectify them. Governors have a good view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide strong challenge to senior leaders, asking searching questions about, for example, the effectiveness of the school's use of the pupil premium.
- You and your senior leaders are working hard to encourage better attendance, particularly among pupils who receive free school meals and those who receive

support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. These steps include providing rewards for good attendance in school and following up promptly on absent pupils, enlisting the support of the local education welfare officer as required. As a result of leaders' work, persistent absence has reduced substantially for these groups and is now only slightly above the national average. However, attendance is still low for these pupils and leaders recognise that they have further work to do to address this issue.

- There have been no permanent exclusions since the publication of the assessment information for 2016. There have been two isolated fixed-term exclusions this year, both of which leaders have managed well, as there have been no repetitions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in the early years consistently provide opportunities within the setting for children to develop their number and calculation skills
- teachers in the early years develop sharper questioning to make sure children make as much progress as they can
- they address the omissions from the school's website and ensure it remains compliant
- they improve pupils' attendance, especially for pupils who receive free school meals and those who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities
- they evaluate the impact on pupils' achievement of all actions in the school's improvement plans and are clear about the reasons for choosing those actions.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits to the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 classes, which were joint activities with you. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, minutes of

meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions and conversations with senior leaders, governors, and pupils. I also had discussions with a representative from the local authority. I listened to pupils read and analysed pupils' work. I evaluated 80 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. During my preparation for the inspection, I also evaluated 75 responses to Parent View, which had been received since September 2015. Furthermore, I analysed 13 responses to the staff questionnaire and 30 responses to the pupil questionnaire.