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Mrs Vicki Lord
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lord

Short inspection of Irk Valley Community School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your passion and commitment have driven forward improvements since your appointment. You are very well supported by other leaders who share your high expectations. Your aspirations are embodied in your school motto of 'REACH', and are shared by governors and staff. Pupils 'REACH' to be the very best that they can be in a culture which promotes respect, excellence, aspiration, cooperation and happiness.

You and your team have successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Staff appreciate the opportunities that they have to work with other colleagues and share expertise. You have developed a culture of high expectations, and staff feel supported and challenged. This is particularly helpful for staff new to teaching. Learning activities are carefully planned to meet the needs of the pupils and provide appropriate levels of challenge. Pupils can use and apply their knowledge and skills in mathematics to investigate and solve problems. Adults use questions skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding and extend their vocabulary, particularly in reading. You have correctly identified that you need to build on the successful changes you have made to the way that you teach reading to improve the progress that pupils make in their writing. You have also acknowledged that you need to accelerate the progress that pupils make in phonics in Year 1, particularly for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils are polite and courteous. There are strong relationships in school. Pupils'

positive attitudes towards learning contribute to the progress that they make. The work in pupils' books shows that they take pride in their work. Pupils know what they need to do to improve, and what the 'next steps' are in their learning. Older pupils take their responsibilities very seriously, as members of the 'rights respecting team' and school committees, prefects and monitors in the Nursery and Reception classes. They feel valued, listened to and part of the democratic decisions made in school. They appreciate the opportunities that they have to participate in a wide range of sporting activities and cultural events. For example, pupils perform Shakespeare at the Royal Exchange Theatre with other local schools. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the way in which teachers make learning fun and interesting by making it relevant to them. Pupils are proud of their school and their place in the community. One pupil who spoke to me said, 'The best thing about Irk Valley School is that we're a multicultural school. There's someone from everywhere here, but we are all from Manchester.'

Parents and carers with whom I spoke during the inspection, and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate your presence outside each morning to welcome them and the care and support that their children receive from staff. You have been very proactive in establishing positive relationships with parents, and they appreciate everything that you and your team do for them and their families. This was summed up in a comment from a parent who said, 'Nothing is too much trouble.' You now need to build on the positive relationships you have with parents, so that they understand that long absences from school can hinder the progress that their children make.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements, including online filtering, are in place. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Pupils said that the 'rights respecting team' members taught them about 'personal space', and the computer monitors set up a blog with games that are suitable for pupils to play online.

Staff and governors receive regular training and know what to do if they have any concerns. You are vigilant in ensuring that the most vulnerable pupils are identified quickly and that they receive any help that they may need. Pupils also said that bullying is rare and behaviour is good. They are confident that any inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked at several lines of enquiry. Firstly, we discussed how the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used. Leaders have accurately identified the key barriers to pupils' learning. You have correctly focused on developing language and communication skills and on expanding pupils' vocabulary. You have changed the way that you teach reading across the school. This is having a positive impact on the progress that disadvantaged pupils

make. Leaders have ensured that staff have received the appropriate training so that they have the skills and knowledge that they need. Teachers use assessment information to accurately identify the precise gaps in pupils' learning, so that they can receive the help that they need to catch up quickly. Assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making accelerated progress as a result of the help that they receive. Improvement in the teaching of reading is having a positive impact on the progress that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making in writing. For example, pupils in Year 3 use their improving vocabulary to write exciting news reports as part of their topic on the Greeks. You have identified that you need to build on these improvements, to ensure that a higher proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are working at the standard expected nationally in reading and writing by the end of key stage 2.

- We also discussed how leaders are supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language. You have ensured that staff have the skills and knowledge that they need to help the youngest pupils. This is because staff work with speech and language professionals to quickly identify the precise gaps in pupils' understanding. Pupils receive the help that they need to improve their communication and language skills when they arrive at school. Help is provided from highly trained staff to provide the specific support that they need to catch up quickly. Workshops and adult learning classes for parents ensure that they have the skills, confidence and understanding that they need to support their children at home.
- Phonics is taught consistently from Reception onwards. Teachers use a range of visual and sensory activities to develop pupils' language skills. Staff use questioning skilfully to encourage pupils to expand their explanations and refine their ideas, particularly in writing. The books that the pupils read, accurately, match their phonic skills and knowledge. Pupils practise their reading at home. Pupils in key stage 1 who spoke to me said that they like learning new words because it helps them with their writing. Despite the progress that pupils make, you have identified that you need to accelerate the progress pupils make in phonics, so that a higher proportion are reaching the level typical for their age by the end of Year 1.
- Next, we looked at the actions that leaders have taken to improve outcomes for children at the end of Reception. The vast majority of children join the school with the skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Leaders and staff quickly identify the gaps in children's learning. Highly trained staff give children the extra help that they need to catch up quickly. Well-considered activities accurately meet the children's needs and capture their imaginations. Established routines promote independence and provide opportunities for children to refine their skills, particularly in writing and number.
- Positive attitudes to learning, cooperation and independence are fostered and modelled by staff in the early years. Staff quickly identify opportunities to enhance children's learning and expand their ideas. For example, staff helping a group of children writing about a dinosaur allowed the children to talk about what they wanted to say and corrected their pronunciation, so they could use their phonic skills accurately. As a result, the children were able to write their own

sentences accurately. The positive relationships nurtured in the early years contributes very effectively to the progress that children make from their starting points below those typical for their age. As a result, the proportion of pupils ready for Year 1 is improving.

- Finally, we looked at pupils' attendance. Staff are extremely vigilant whenever pupils are absent, particularly the most vulnerable. You know your families very well and, as a result, you can provide the help that they need to establish routines, particularly in the mornings. This contributes to a prompt arrival at school for the majority of pupils. Pupils appreciate the range of rewards and prizes that they can achieve for attending school every day. Attendance is above the national average, which is beginning to have an impact on improving progress rates for pupils. However, there are still pupils who are persistently absent from school for long periods of time. You acknowledge that you need to build on the positive relationships that you have developed with parents, to ensure that they understand that long absences from school can hinder the progress that their children make.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in the teaching of reading are sustained so that the writing of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, improves, and more achieve the standard expected nationally by the end of key stage 2
- pupils' progress in phonics accelerates, particularly that of pupils who speak English as an additional language, so that more reach the standard expected for their age by the end of Year 1
- they build on the positive relationships with parents so that they understand the importance of children attending school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other members of the leadership team and staff. I also met with two members of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. I conducted a learning walk with you and we visited classrooms, where I had the opportunity to speak with pupils

and look at their work. I met with a group of pupils formally during the day and I spoke with a number of parents at the start of the school day. I also took account of the two free-text comments and the 160 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I scrutinised pupils' assessment information, the school's self-evaluation document and your school improvement plan. I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child-protection procedures and practices.