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4 March 2014

Mark Garside  
Headteacher  
The International School  
Gressel Lane  
Tile Cross  
Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Garside

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The International School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. 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. The school should take further action to:

- Refine the school action plan to:
  - reduce key actions into small steps, linked to measurable targets for achievement, attendance and exclusions that must be met along the way to being a good school
  - sharpen the timescales for monitoring so that this is regular and frequent and enables governors to ask searching questions.
- Make sure that leaders at all levels carry out regular checks on improvements being made in teaching and marking and use this information to urgently challenge teachers where there are weaknesses.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a group of students to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation presented by senior leaders. Two members of your senior leadership team accompanied me on a visit to the support area and the newly formed 'reflection unit'. I also visited a number of lessons, accompanied by a senior leader, to look at the variety of teaching approaches being used and the quality of marking in students' books.

## **Context**

There have been some changes in staffing since the school was inspected including the appointment of a new subject leader for mathematics, a leader of literacy and a leader of support for more able, gifted and talented students. Additional teaching assistants have also been appointed to work with families where children are at the very early stages of learning English.

## **Main findings**

Together with your senior leaders and governors, you show a strong determination to make this a good school. Since the inspection you have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching in the school. For example, you have recently organised two separate whole staff training sessions on accelerating progress for the more able, gifted and talented students and also using assessment information to plan activities which challenge students of all abilities. You have introduced a new policy on marking and giving information to students so that they know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers were observed to be using these strategies during the short visits made to lessons. Students are being challenged through the activities planned and there are early indications of students acting on the advice given to them in marking. Leaders at all levels now need to make sure these early improvements continue and, where there are weaknesses within subject areas, challenge teachers to improve so that more teaching is consistently good or better. Teachers are receiving very effective support through a range of programmes including the 'improving teacher' and 'outstanding teacher' programmes delivered through the Teaching School Alliance.

You have successfully reduced the number of exclusions for all students, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. You have achieved this through introducing a more effective way of supporting students who present challenging behaviours. The newly formed 'reflection unit' provides a very effective base where students are encouraged to consider their behaviours and how this affects others. Students usually spend a day in the unit, withdrawn from their lessons, and work is provided for these students so that they do not fall behind. Whilst in the unit they receive effective support through a teaching assistant.

Prior to your last inspection, your literacy strategy focussed mainly on students in Years 7 and 8. This has now been extended across the school. Partnerships with local primary schools are at the early stage of development but these will provide greater consistency in the approach taken to teach reading through phonics (decoding words using letter sound combinations). Primary teachers will shortly be supporting teachers in your school with training in the teaching of phonics.

Improvements to your curriculum are planned to provide all students with the opportunity to learn music, information technology and religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4. You are currently making financial arrangements to introduce these plans for September 2014.

The external review of governance, recommended at your last inspection, took place in January. The resulting report identified gaps in the knowledge, skills and understanding of governors which will affect their ability to provide challenge and to hold staff to account. For example, governors need to improve their knowledge of how assessment information is used in the school. Training for governors will be provided through the partner schools that are providing external support. Governors intend to observe governors' meetings in the partner schools at the earliest opportunity. Information on achievement, attendance and exclusions which is presented to governors is not sufficiently refined to enable them to ask challenging questions related to this information. The school action plan needs refining to break down key actions into small steps, linked to measurable targets, which governors can use to monitor the progress towards becoming a good school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

Groups of teachers are already benefitting from opportunities to observe outstanding teaching in John Henry Newman Catholic College, a partner school. This will shortly be extended following the formalising of a support contract with an additional external partner, Bishop Challoner School.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**