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Mr Gary Postlethwaite
Headteacher
Victoria Junior School
Victoria Road
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Dear Mr Postlethwaite

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Victoria Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 25 November 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please extend my thanks to the local authority representative, staff and pupils who met with me.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 November 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter. There have been few changes to the school's context since the last inspection: one teacher has left and has not been replaced. Just prior to that inspection there had been significant changes to the leadership team with three temporary headteachers appointed to the school during the previous three years.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Some improvement is evident in the general running of the school. Leaders have provided stability following a period of turbulence. They have developed relationships with the community and, together with staff, have created a bright, welcoming learning environment. The school is secure and staff are caring, so that pupils feel safe and happy. Pupils behave well in lessons and show consideration for each other in communal areas. Staff have embraced opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and leaders have forged links with schools in different contexts. Staff are keen to engage in professional development opportunities and are fully committed to improving the school.

September 2010



However, in-school monitoring and self-evaluation lack the depth and understanding required to help teachers improve provision and raise pupils' achievement. Feedback from lesson observations does not fully identify weaknesses or give teachers constructive feedback on what they could improve. School leaders have introduced a system to track pupils' progress in all year groups. While this provides a useful tool to identify and support underachievement, it is currently providing an overly optimistic view of the pace of learning and the standards that are likely to be achieved by the end of Year 6. This is because the level at which pupils' independent skills are secure in their day-to-day work is not as high as the levels recorded from set and assessed pieces. A scrutiny of pupils' books indicated that the standard of work in the current Year 6 class is below expectations based on their prior attainment at Key Stage 1. Evidence from this monitoring visit indicates that teaching and the use of assessment have not improved sufficiently since the last inspection. These weaknesses and the lack of improvement mean that the school has made inadequate progress in demonstrating better capacity.

Pupils enter the school in Year 3 with broadly average attainment. At the time of the last inspection, the majority were attaining average levels by the end of Year 6 and making satisfactory progress from their starting points. However, pupils' attainment in the standardised assessment tests fell in 2009 and was significantly below average in all subjects. The school's internal assessments indicate that attainment was similarly low in 2010. Pupils are not making the expected progress in key literacy and numeracy skills across the school because there are gaps in their learning. Consequently, their writing lacks fluency by the time they reach Year 6; spelling is weak and the presentation and handwriting of many pupils is poor. Their mathematical understanding is not sufficiently strong to enable them to apply their knowledge in a range of contexts.

Eight parts of lessons were observed and some good practice was seen. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils worked with perseverance to solve challenging number problems. In Year 3, good teacher explanation enabled pupils to search for and classify information successfully. Teachers have all worked hard to introduce more interesting and interactive activities into lessons, so that pupils enjoy learning to a greater extent. Pupils are keen to learn and are cooperative in lessons. Despite these improvements, there is too much ineffective practice which slows the pace of learning. Plenary sessions were generally weak in the lessons observed; they were often rushed and did not reinforce pupils' learning or address misconceptions. Some lessons were focused on the completion of an activity which did not challenge or motivate pupils. In others, the teacher's explanation lacked clarity or did not sufficiently exemplify and demonstrate new learning.

Assessment is not used sufficiently well across the whole school to ensure teaching is well matched to learning needs and ensure consistent progress from day to day.

Reading, writing and numeracy skills are not taught systematically or progressively and pupils have limited opportunity to practise their skills through extended writing or problem solving. Marking has been reviewed but it is of variable quality. It is often not specific enough, which means pupils continue to make the same errors.

The deputy headteacher is leading developments effectively in curriculum planning to promote broader learning opportunities and ensure greater continuity in learning and progression of skills. These plans provide a useful foundation for further development but have not had an impact on provision to date as they are at very early stages. Broader leadership roles and responsibilities within the school are at similarly early stages of development. The mathematics subject leader has produced a clear action plan based on a good understanding of priorities, but it is not yet being implemented. The English subject leader is new to the role and requires further support to develop skills and knowledge required of the role.

The local authority is providing appropriate support and challenge to the school but it has had limited impact on the overall quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. There are robust plans in place to secure further support for leadership and management and professional development for staff.

I hope that you found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2008

- Raise standards across the school, especially improving the progress of the more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best, especially in the match of work to the capabilities and needs of more able pupils.
- Ensure that the results of assessments and academic guidance are used in lessons to help pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' awareness of cultural diversity.