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Ms L Addington
The Headteacher
Vernon House School
Drury Way
London
NW10 0NQ

Dear Ms Addington

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Vernon House School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 October 2010, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils for sharing their work with me and to the time given by the Chair of the Governing Body and the School Improvement Partner. I would be grateful too if you could thank the parents and carers who took time to meet me.

Since the previous inspection the number of classes has reduced from five to three because of falling rolls. Pupils are taught in mixed-age-range classes. There have been considerable staffing problems over the last two years. These include a number of changes to teaching staff, with an increase last year but a reduction this year. There has also been a considerable turnover of teaching assistants with only two from the previous inspection still in post. Only one governor remains from the previous governing body.

As a result of the inspection on 9 October 2008, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

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.

The school has made satisfactory progress in improving assessment procedures. It is now better equipped to monitor the achievements of pupils because of improvements in gathering information about their progress. Staff are still developing their skills in assessment and their judgements on pupil progress are becoming more secure as a result of the good quality training provided by the deputy headteacher. Progress in mathematics last year was not as secure as literacy



and the school has analysed the causes for this. Analysis of data also showed that writing is an area for development and there is a concerted focus on improving pupils' skills this year. Pupils are now being set targets for their learning and new assessment procedures for recording the progress of pupils have been introduced. However, not all staff use the new system effectively.

The considerable upheaval caused by staffing problems has made it difficult for the school to improve teaching. It is a testament to the leadership of the headteacher and deputy that some strengths within teaching have been maintained. Good practice is evident, such as encouraging pupils to write independently in a Year 3 and 4 lesson and in enabling Years 1, 2 and 3 to develop their counting skills. Relationships with pupils are good and behaviour is managed well. Staff remind pupils about making the right choices and that they will need to catch up on learning time if they do not stay on task. Learning objectives are shared with pupils in some lessons, although these are often about the tasks pupils will complete rather than the skills they will gain. There are limited references in lessons to pupils' targets and, although staff are aware of these, they do not always ensure work reflects pupils' range of abilities. Teaching assistants work well with pupils, although teachers are over reliant on them to support pupils in completing tasks rather than setting work that is matched to the different abilities in each class.

Whilst senior staff have ensured that the afternoon topic work is planned effectively, the curriculum overall is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient teaching time and this prevents pupils from making better progress. Monitoring of the curriculum has not been sufficiently rigorous. Senior leaders are not confident about what is being taught in the morning sessions so pupils have sufficient experiences in the core subjects. This was not the case last year, but a new system has been introduced and, as yet, not all teachers' planning has been evaluated. The lack of monitoring is most evident at 'breakfast' time sessions in which opportunities are missed, particularly for older pupils, to develop a range of skills and interact effectively with staff.

As at the time of the last inspection, there is a good focus on supporting pupils emotionally and in terms of their behaviour. Pupils say how much they enjoy school and this is reflected in improved attendance for many of them. Parents and carers are very positive about the impact the school has had on their children and how much their behaviour has improved in school and at home. Parents and pupils agree that the school is a safe place to be and, when incidents do occur, staff are quick to respond and deal with any issues. There are potentially good systems in place for recording incidents but staff do not consistently use them. For example, not all incidents of restraint are recorded. There are good checks to ensure staff are vetted before starting work at the school and staff are aware of child protection procedures.

The impact of dealing with staffing problems has been considerable, proving to be time consuming and financially draining for the school. It has had an impact on staff morale. The strong, determined leadership of the headteacher and her deputy has

ensured that there have been improvements. These include developing a range of teaching rooms and improving outdoor play areas. Assessment systems are in place and training for teaching assistants has been effective in supporting their skills. However, there has been insufficient time to monitor the impact of all of the changes in school. As a result, there are inconsistencies in provision. The headteacher and deputy are supported well by the new governing body. Governors are very clear about the relative strengths and difficulties the school faces. There has been good support from the School Improvement Partner, but the local authority has not provided adequate help and assistance in resolving ongoing staffing problems and in enabling the school to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 9 October 2008.

- Fully implement the new assessment systems and use them to track pupils' attainment systematically; to provide the information needed to plan for individuals' progress; to set pupils clear, challenging academic targets that they know and understand.
- Develop suitable planning for the topic-based curriculum approach, and ensure that learning in the various subjects is both planned for, and assessed.