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17 October 2012

Mr Simon Way
Headteacher
Victoria Road Primary School
Victoria Road
Ashford
Kent
TN23 7HQ

Dear Mr Way

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Victoria Road Primary School

Thank you for the help which you, your staff and your pupils gave when I inspected your school on 16 October 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the member of the Governing Body, local authority advisor and senior staff who met with me to discuss the school's progress.

Since the inspection in March 2012, two teachers have left the school and have been replaced by new members of staff.

As a result of the inspection on 7–8 March 2012, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

School leaders and staff have made a really good start in tackling underachievement at the end of Key Stage 2 so that in the 2012 assessments, there was a sharp rise in the achievement of Year 6 pupils. As a result, most pupils achieved as well in English and mathematics as pupils in other schools. However, there was not a similar rise in Key Stage 1, and last year's Year 2 pupils did less well in reading and mathematics than the national averages and their achievement in writing was very low. The school's detailed assessment information shows that in most, but not all, classes, pupils made satisfactory progress last year. Across the school, pupils achieve less

well in writing, too few pupils achieve at the higher levels in all subjects and there is variability between classes in pupils' achievement in mathematics.

The recently introduced regular multiplication tables challenge activities are making a difference so that, during the visit, Year 6 pupils used their knowledge of times tables quickly and accurately to simplify fractions. There is an increased emphasis on helping pupils to spell words correctly and use punctuation appropriately. Pupils are enjoying more opportunities to write in different subjects and the greater links between learning across the curriculum. For example, Year 5 pupils produced good quality writing, explaining how they designed and made ear muffs and how they would do things differently next time. The actual ear muffs were varied and interesting, too. Improvements are more evident in some classes than others and, in lessons such as mathematics, pupils are not always expected to spell important vocabulary correctly. The work in pupils' books shows that, in some classes, pupils are not making enough progress because they do not have sufficient opportunities to produce enough work to practise and develop their skills, particularly in writing. Assessment information is used more effectively to set pupils' targets, and the school has worked hard to improve the quality and usefulness of teachers' marking, particularly in writing. As a result, there are good examples, in all classes, of pupils responding to the teachers' comments and improving their work. The quality of marking in mathematics is not as good.

The quality of teaching is improving. The majority of the lessons seen during the visit were taught well and pupils made good progress. Pupils behave well and, in the better lessons, their attitudes to learning are also good and they are keen to do their best. However, there are still too many lessons that are not good enough to help them achieve as well as possible. The results of this variation in the quality of teaching can be seen in the pupils' books, where, in a few classes, the quantity and quality of work are not good enough.

Most lessons are carefully planned with activities which are designed to interest the pupils, build on previous learning and meet the needs of different abilities. Teaching assistants skilfully help pupils become independent learners whilst still giving them appropriate support. Pupils usually know what learning is expected during lessons because the teachers always share the learning objectives with them. There are examples of very good practice, which the school can build on, where teachers provide opportunities throughout the lesson to build on and develop good learning. For example, in a Year 5 writing lesson, pupils developed their understanding of good story planning by sharing their ideas with a partner, asking questions and making suggestions as to how their plans could be improved. At the end of a Year 2 writing lesson, the teacher used good questioning skills to help pupils review whether they had achieved the lesson's objectives. Where pupils do not make good progress in lessons, it is generally because teachers are not clear what the pupils need to do to achieve well. Teachers do not always expect the pupils to produce enough high quality work and, even in the best lessons, there is more to do to challenge more able pupils.

The headteacher has continued to build on the improvements which were commented on in the previous inspection report. The impact of these improvements can be seen most clearly in the rise in pupils' achievement at Key Stage 2 and in the quality of teaching. There is a clear sense of purpose and shared commitment throughout the school. As well as being enthusiastic and knowledgeable leaders, senior staff are also effective classroom teachers, which strengthens their coaching and mentoring roles. All staff, including teaching assistants, have benefitted from professional development opportunities and this is giving them a clearer understanding of how best to teach aspects of reading, writing and mathematics, mark pupils' work and use assessment information. Teachers now have more responsibility for checking pupils' learning and assessments. For instance, senior leaders and class teachers meet each term to discuss the achievement of all pupils, to identify the pupils who are at risk of underachieving and to agree the actions that will be taken. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the general strengths and weaknesses but the focus is very much on what the adults do rather than checking whether these changes are making a real difference to the pupils' learning. This is reflected in the school improvement plan, which does not have measurable targets or milestones based on pupils' achievement. Similarly, although monitoring does happen, it is not sufficiently regular, rigorous and is too focused on teaching rather than learning.

The local authority is providing the school with a suitable level of support. This is helping teachers and senior leaders to develop and improve their practice. The local authority's statement of action was judged to be fit for purpose when submitted to Ofsted. However, like the school improvement plan, it is not sufficiently focused on pupils' achievement.

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

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

By July 2013, raise pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics, especially that of more able pupils, from Years 2 to 6, so that it is at least in line with national averages, through:

- developing teachers' marking so that pupils are clear about the next steps they need to take to improve their work
- providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy skills when writing in other subjects
- improving pupils' punctuation and spelling
- improving pupils' quick recall of number facts.

Improve teaching by:

- developing staff expertise in the teaching of writing and mathematics using assessment information to plan lessons that are well matched to all pupils' abilities, especially for the more able
- planning activities that are engaging and well matched to the lessons' aims
- checking on pupils' understanding and progress during lessons.