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29 January 2014

Mrs Sue Taylor  
Headteacher  
Victoria Road Primary School  
Victoria Road  
Runcorn  
Cheshire  
WA7 5BN

Dear Mrs Taylor

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Victoria Road Primary School, Halton**

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. 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:

- help pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding to make swifter progress so the gaps between them and their peers close more quickly
- get the best out of school-based data by collating and analysing information about the progress different groups of pupils make from their different starting points over time.

### **Evidence**

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, a local authority officer and eight members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We visited five classrooms to observe teaching, talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I also met with a small group of older pupils to gain their views on the changes you have made since the last inspection. School data, including the unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised. The school improvement plan and documentation produced by the governing body was also considered.

## **Context**

Three new governors have been appointed since the inspection in November 2012. One teacher has been absent since the beginning of the academic year. The local authority has withdrawn the warning notice which was issued prior to the last inspection.

## **Main findings**

You have not let the grass grow under your feet. The pace of change I noted at my last visit to your school has continued because staff and governors are seeing the fruits of their labour and all are hungry for greater success. Your relentless drive to improve means you have delivered on all of your planned actions. Nonetheless, you are not content to stand still; although you are delighted with the positive impact of your work, you are still aiming high. As a result, you have already mapped out the next phase of the school's journey to help pupils make the best possible progress in all subjects, not just English and mathematics.

Your work is making a difference and pupils are getting a much better deal than they did in the past. The 2013 unvalidated results are the best the school has achieved in recent years. Year 6 pupils did as well as all pupils across the county in reading, writing and mathematics because they made expected progress from their Year 2 starting points. Stronger teaching in Year 6 helped these pupils make faster gains in their learning; this made up for the time they had lost in previous years. Standards also improved at the end of Year 2. Nonetheless, as you recognise, there is more work to do to lift achievement in Key Stage 1. Pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium lag behind other groups in the school. Nonetheless, this gap is closing over time. The 2013 data show this group was two terms behind in their learning by the time they left Year 6; previously, they trailed behind their classmates by over a year. Your own data confirm pupils' achievement is becoming stronger across the school, for example, two out of every three pupils in the current Year 6 has already made the progress normally expected by the end of the year.

Teachers are flying because you have given them the skills and the confidence to bring out the best in pupils. The care and attention teachers give to marking pupils' work and creating imaginative and purposeful classrooms points to staff who have bought into your vision. Your frequent checks on teaching and helpful feedback are harnessing teachers' desire to be the best. Some teachers are really leading the way because they are good at crafting lessons which promote pupils' resilience, independence and problem solving skills. Teaching is improving because you have invested time and energy in developing teachers' subject knowledge and establishing whole-school strategies for teaching basic skills. Teachers are becoming increasingly reflective. They almost do not need your feedback because they are willing and able to identify what is working well in their classrooms and pinpoint what they need to do to improve further. This open and honest relationship between you, other leaders and teachers mean there are no barriers preventing you from lifting the quality of teaching further.

You know your pupils well because you keep a close eye on the progress every individual is making towards their goals. You have a wealth of data. Nonetheless, you are not always making best use of this information to identify how well each group is doing from their different starting points.

Pupils are delighted with the changes you have made. They say they get more out of their learning because they have greater opportunities to do practical activities, teachers explain new ideas clearly and teachers make learning fun. One pupil's comment 'you learn something new every day' neatly sums up the views of others.

A review of governance led by an external consultant and the support provided by the local authority means governors are better placed to fulfil their role. They have an increasing knowledge of the school because they visit more frequently and they review and discuss data. As a result, they are beginning to ask more challenging questions about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Their determination to improve is reflected in the time they are investing in their own development, for example, meeting on Saturdays to develop their own governors' handbook.

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**

The local authority has signalled its confidence in your success by no longer keeping such a close watch on your work. Nonetheless, it is wisely maintaining the same level of support so that you can quickly access help when it is needed. You are using the support well to improve the quality of teaching, governors' effectiveness and to develop more efficient systems for checking data. You are also benefitting from the advice and guidance of an external consultant. This work has been helpful in developing the skills of senior leaders in checking teaching and in guiding the governing body to identify what they need to do to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**