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Mr K. Duggan
Headteacher
Victoria Road Primary School
Trelawney Avenue
Plymouth
PL5 1RH

Dear Mr Duggan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Victoria Road Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 June 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 January 2014. 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:

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, to match the best practice
- evaluate the information on pupils' progress, and present the evaluation to the governors in a way that helps them to quickly and clearly see which groups are meeting and exceeding the national expectations for progress and which are not.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, a group of pupils, the Chair of Governors, a National Leader of Education and a representative from the local authority, to

discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and information on pupils' achievement was examined. You and I carried out joint lesson observations of each class in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, four members of staff have resigned. A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 has been appointed for September 2014.

Main findings

The headteacher and governors are tackling staff absence in the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes appropriately. The school will be fully staffed in September 2014. In the meantime, the deputy head is covering the teaching in the Year 2 class. She has high expectations of these pupils and they enjoy the challenging work she sets them. As a result, they are making good progress and gaps in their learning are closing. Pupils continue to make good progress in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 2. The English and mathematics subject leaders are sharing the good practice in Key Stage 2 with teachers in Key Stage 1, and improvements are beginning to be seen.

Across the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, teachers are now providing lessons that interest and engage the pupils. They are making better use of their assessments to plan work at the right levels for pupils' different learning needs. They are also providing clearer direction to teaching assistants, so that they know specifically what they need to do to help pupils to learn. However, some teachers are not checking pupils' progress enough during lessons, and adjusting the activities, the pace and their questions to maintain good progress. This affects the amount of progress made especially by the most able pupils who learn quickly, but are then not expected to move onto more challenging work in the lesson. Children enter the Reception class with skills that are well below those expected for their age, particularly in language. The pace of developing skills in speaking, listening and writing is not quick enough in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enable them to catch up to where they should be at the start of Key Stage 1.

Across the school, improvements in pupils' writing were seen in the high quality of displays. In all key stages, pupils are now given more opportunities for writing in their topic work and, in Reception and Key Stage 1, in role play areas. The scheme used for lessons in phonics (the sounds that letters make) has been supplemented by a programme involving pupils in talking about their ideas before writing. This is helping to develop pupils' confidence in, and enthusiasm for, writing. Pupils are also beginning to learn to join their handwriting so that they can get their ideas down on paper more quickly. They say that teachers' marking helps them to know how to

improve their work and this was evident in their books. The school has developed effective procedures for checking that pupils make the required improvements.

Behaviour and attendance continue to be good and the school's work to keep pupils safe remains highly effective. The school supports pupils with particular behavioural needs well.

The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching. He has developed a strong leadership team with clear roles and responsibilities for improving teaching and learning. The leadership team is quickly establishing systems and procedures to bring about improvements, such as the approach to teaching writing and the marking policy. Through displays of pupils' work and resources, they have created a positive learning environment which the pupils value.

The school's action plan provides clear direction for the improvements and is monitored regularly, although there is no written evaluation of the impact of actions on pupils' achievement. The attainment of pupils in each year group, including disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, the most able pupils and pupils who are supported by the pupil premium funding, is also checked regularly. There is no evaluation commentary of the progress being made by each group each term. In the absence of this, it is difficult for the governors to quickly and clearly see whether or not progress is in line with national expectations, where the impact of teaching is stronger and weaker, and what further action is needed. Governors are presented with too much detail which results in their lack of clarity about what the information is telling them. As a result, they are not able to hold the school to account effectively.

The governing body is rightly seeking an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses from external reports, presentations from the headteacher and other staff, and through visiting the 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

The school is drawing upon the support provided by the local authority and teaching school alliance well. The support includes visits from a local authority adviser and a National Leader of Education (NLE) who have helped to establish the new staffing structure, to develop the skills of the headteacher and senior leaders in monitoring the action plan, including lesson observations, and to create a positive learning environment. It also includes arranging support from another local authority in developing the teaching of writing. The impact is evident in the improvement in pupils' skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector