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12 March 2007

Mr A Morrish  
The Headteacher  
Victoria Park Primary  
Ballot Street  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mr Morrish

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF VICTORIA PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Dorothy Bathgate HMI and Joanna Pike, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 February 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, one of the deputy headteachers, the seconded assistant headteacher who is also the numeracy coordinator, the coordinators for science and special educational needs, the teacher who is taking temporary responsibility for literacy, a representative from the local authority (LA), and the chair of governors.

### Context

Temporary teachers are currently covering five classes: two for teachers who are ill; and the other three for vacant posts. Two permanent teachers have recently been appointed. One will take up her post from next week and the

other from the start of the summer term. An assistant headteacher has been seconded from a neighbouring school for two terms to work in the Foundation Stage. She is also taking short term responsibility leading the development of numeracy. There is no literacy coordinator, but a teacher is temporarily assisting in the leadership of this area as part of her professional development. Interviews for three substantive assistant headship posts are due to take place next week.

## Achievement and standards

Recently published validated data for 2006 confirm that, as reported by the previous monitoring inspection, standards in the end of key stage tests in all core subjects for Key Stages 1 and 2 were well below national averages. The Key Stage 2 results indicate that pupils made very poor progress during the key stage.

Standards in mathematics, English and science remain very low in Year 6 despite improved teaching because many pupils have not been adequately taught in previous years. Pupils in all year groups have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. However, the school's own assessments and inspection evidence indicate that an increasing proportion of pupils are making satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. The school does not yet have an accurate picture of how well pupils are achieving in science. Overall, improved teaching and better use of much more accurate assessment data have led to improved progress throughout the school and begun a slow, but perceptible, rise in standards in Years 1 to 5. A range of intervention strategies is helping some pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities to make good progress with their basic skills, particularly with their reading. The school understands that all pupils need to make good progress for standards to rise at an appropriately fast rate and all actions taken by the leadership team and teachers are driven by this goal.

Systems for tracking the pupils' progress are very good and are being well used. The leadership team has accurately identified where staff need further support or training and this is being effectively provided by LA consultants.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- raise standards and tackle underachievement in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that expectations are high for all children – satisfactory.

## Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy school and are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors. Relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils are generally good. In lessons pupils work well with each other, particularly in small groups

or with their partner. The recently revised behaviour policy is being consistently applied throughout the school by all staff, with positive outcomes both inside and outside the classroom. The good behaviour seen in the previous two visits has been maintained and pupils understand the high expectations set by the school and the consequences of any inappropriate behaviour.

Effective systems to monitor attendance are having a significant impact on attendance. The school is successfully working in partnership with parents to further improve attendance. Attendance is now at its highest since 2004 and is in line with the national average for primary schools. Automated telephone calls made on the first day that a pupil is away from school help to ensure that absences are authorised as appropriate. The recently introduced attendance certificates for pupils are improving their motivation to attend regularly. A policy of zero tolerance towards term time holidays, well supported by the governing body, has successfully reduced the number of requests.

The headteacher has rightly identified that the pupils' cultural diversity is not sufficiently recognised or celebrated within the school and has begun to take a series of appropriate steps to address this.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- improve attendance and make sure parents are aware of the impact of poor attendance on their children's learning – good.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. More good lessons were seen than during the previous monitoring inspection. Because of the determined approach by senior leaders to driving improvements in teaching, all teachers are aware of effective ways of helping pupils learn and they have risen to the challenge of raising standards. Elements of effective methods were present in every lesson and some teachers used them well. The increased use of these approaches is leading to pupils making better progress in lessons. For example, in all lessons pupils were told what they would learn and had opportunities to reflect on how successful they had been during the lesson. A particularly effective strategy was the use of 'working walls' where teachers had displays of examples and advice for the week's lessons in literacy, numeracy and science. This helped pupils to recall their previous learning, to remember how to be successful, and increased their independence. Pupils were frequently asked to explain what they had learnt, what they needed to do in the next lesson, and how the teacher could help them, indicating an increased use of effective self assessment. In most lessons, teachers gave pupils opportunities to contribute their ideas which encouraged them to think.

Teachers have become better at matching tasks to pupils' needs. This is helped by the increased use of assessment to inform planning for the next lesson. Assessment data is also being used well to monitor pupils' progress more effectively.

In lessons where planning did not sufficiently focus on building learning in small steps or staff did not model the task and learning steps well, pupils made less progress. When teachers talked too frequently, achievement was also hindered as pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to develop their speaking skills or to explain their reasoning. Occasionally, teachers talked for too long and this led to pupils losing interest because they were passive. Learning support practitioners did not always effectively support identified groups of pupils within a lesson and this resulted in these pupils making inadequate progress because they had no support from an adult.

Marking has improved greatly and there are examples of outstanding practice in a Year 4 and a Year 5 class. In these classes pupils receive very useful advice about how to improve. Additionally, pupils have benefited from assessing their own and each other's work so that they have begun to understand better how to support their own and each other's learning. Some of their comments are already perceptive and sophisticated. This has also contributed effectively to pupils' personal development.

The school has recently introduced a new thematic curriculum to help make better links in order to develop skills across different subjects. This is still at an early stage and it is too soon to evaluate its impact. The school is committed to developing a child centred, play based approach to learning in the Foundation Stage. An excellent two year strategic development plan for early years is in the first stages of implementation. The Foundation Stage unit has been refurbished and many new resources have been purchased to provide a high quality, stimulating, learning environment. Importantly, the staff have already begun to provide more opportunities for open ended thinking and problem solving.

The school has improved its provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Intervention strategies are becoming better targeted and their impact is monitored rigorously to ensure that they are effective.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- put in place a whole school teaching and learning policy to bring about consistently high quality teaching across the school – good.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher and the leadership team have taken extremely robust steps to improve provision since the previous inspection and these have been very effective. A suitably rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has given them an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. A subsequent programme of support for individual teachers has led to good improvements in the quality of teaching in several classes. By making it very clear what the expectations are for each lesson, the leadership team has begun to establish a culture of shared responsibility which staff have welcomed. Systems for tracking the pupils' progress are very well managed. Their clarity allows the leadership team to be highly vigilant about the progress of pupils in each class and to take prompt action where necessary. The half termly interviews, which the headteacher holds with each teacher, have increased the accountability for pupils' progress as well as helping to identify any support which either staff or pupils need. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is very well led and managed.

Teachers have responded very positively to this growing culture of accountability and aspiration and are rising to the challenges which have been set for them. As teaching improves they are recognising their successes and sharing these with each other. The school has managed staffing vacancies and absence well. Temporary teachers are being well supported. Two new permanent teachers have been appointed. Vacancies have allowed the headteacher to finalise his leadership structure and interviews for three assistant headteacher posts are planned for next week. Teachers' growing competence, coupled with progressively more stable staffing, is increasing the school's ability to address the areas for improvement

Since the previous inspection four new governors have been appointed, including a new chair. These appointments have injected renewed vigour into the governing body. Governors are now much better placed to provide the school with the necessary level of challenge and support. Appropriate training for the full governing body has improved their understanding of their role and more is planned. Each governor is beginning to establish a link with a subject area and subject leaders have welcomed governors' recent visits.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005:

- establish an effective leadership team to drive forward significant improvement – good
- organise and carry out a rigorous whole school programme of monitoring, evaluation and review – good.

## External support

The effectiveness of the local authority's support for the school has improved. A number of consultants and advanced skills teachers have continued to support the school. A termly meeting of all those who work in the school, led by the school improvement adviser, has given the LA a better structure through which to organise and prioritise its support. The work of a second school improvement adviser has had an excellent impact on aspects of teachers' practice, most notably on the use of assessment for learning and 'working walls'. The LA's evaluation of the impact of its own support still lacks cohesion.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed only after prior consultation with HMI.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Provide appropriate training for teaching assistants to enable them to support both individuals and whole groups effectively in lessons

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Education and Children's Services for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King  
H M Inspector