

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



19 April 2018

Mrs Emma Roberts
Headteacher
Victoria Road Primary School
Victoria Road
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 5BN

Dear Mrs Roberts

Short inspection of Victoria Road Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school's aims, ethos and culture are captured very well in the highly positive comments from parents and carers. 'Caring', 'friendly', 'welcoming' and 'happy' were words used by many parents to describe your school. Parents were also full of praise for the ways in which teachers inspire their children's love of learning and teach them how to be good citizens. All of these features were evident during my visit to your school.

While you have been part of the school's senior leadership team for some time, you have only been the school's substantive headteacher for a year. You know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are supported effectively by your deputy headteacher and two senior teachers. When your school was last inspected, inspectors asked leaders to improve standards in writing, especially for the most able pupils, and to ensure that pupils in key stage 1 were consistently challenged. Leaders have tackled the recommendation to improve writing very well. Teachers are skilled and think of a variety of ways to motivate pupils to write. They give them plenty of opportunities to practise and improve their writing in different subjects. One pupil commented: 'In our school, writing is never dull or boring.' Pupils' books and displays of their writing across the curriculum show that they achieve well in this aspect of English. In the last two years, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard at end of Year 2 and Year 6 has been above average. In both

years, the proportion of Year 2 pupils writing at greater depth has been close to the national average. The proportion of Year 6 pupils writing at greater depth has not been as large, but the most able pupils made good progress.

Leaders' work to address the recommendation to improve standards in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 2 has not met with the same success. Typically, standards in these subjects have been below average since the last inspection, with mathematics generally weaker than reading. Additionally, the standards attained by disadvantaged pupils in reading and mathematics have been lower than those of non-disadvantaged pupils at the school and nationally. A more positive picture of achievement in reading and mathematics is evident by the end of Year 6. During key stage 2, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make good progress in these subjects. In the last two years, standards by the end of Year 6 have been at least in line with those nationally of pupils of the same age. Moreover, disadvantaged pupils' attainment in these subjects was not significantly different from that of other pupils nationally. By the end of Year 6, pupils are well prepared for secondary school.

You recognise that raising attainment in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 2 remains a priority. You are also ensuring a strong focus on diminishing differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. To address these weaknesses, you have made several changes to the curriculum for reading and mathematics. You consider that these are working well and anticipate that standards will be higher this year. It is still too early, however, to say whether the expected improvements will be sustained.

You also recognised that, since the school was last inspected, the gap between children's attainment at the end of Reception and that of children of the same age nationally has widened considerably. In 2017, only just over half the Reception children attained the good level of development needed to be ready for work in key stage 1. You have rightly identified this as a priority for improvement.

In key stages 1 and 2, pupils receive a broad and rich curriculum. Classrooms and corridors are alive with pupils' high-quality artwork and writing. There is plentiful evidence of pupils engaging in challenging science investigations. Stimulating fieldwork, research and problem-solving activities deepen pupils' learning of history, geography and design technology. The pupils I spoke to were highly enthusiastic about their learning and described how teachers' imagination and creativity make learning fun. They provided many examples, which included mummifying a tomato to preserve its skin; using honey, treacle and tomato sauce to investigate how liquids flow and engaging in drama to explore moral dilemmas, such as deforestation. Pupils' learning is further enriched by a wide range of visiting experts and thoughtfully planned educational visits.

Pupils like and respect their teachers and rise to teachers' high expectations of their behaviour and effort. Pupils' enjoyment and pride in their work are very evident in the care they take over its presentation. The pupils with whom I spoke consider that behaviour is mostly good or excellent. They said that bullying is rare, but teachers deal with it well when it happens. Most of the parents who completed

Ofsted's online survey share pupils' positive views about behaviour and the school's approach to bullying. Pupils appreciate the worth and importance of understanding and respecting people's differences. They said that they very occasionally hear some name-calling of a racist nature but, as one pupil said, 'We don't like it and we don't accept it.' Pupils said that they more frequently hear the word 'gay' used in an inappropriate way. Those who have been on the receiving end of this type of name-calling recognise the distress it can cause. You have a system to record incidents of misbehaviour, including bullying. However, you were unable to demonstrate how allegations of bullying are investigated and resolved. You explained that there are no entries of racist or homophobic name-calling in your behaviour log because none has ever been reported to you. You appreciate the importance of regularly reminding pupils and staff to report these types of behaviour.

Many of the governors I met, including the chair, are long-serving members of the governing body and are devoted to the school and its pupils. Most visit the school regularly because they are keen to keep in touch with what is happening and want staff and pupils to know who they are. Governors keep a close eye on the school's budget and ask questions about pupils' test and assessment results. Governors know that standards in some parts of the school are not as good as they should be. However, some governors too readily place the blame for this on children's standards on entry to Reception.

Safeguarding is effective.

During the inspection, urgent action was needed to ensure that the school's register of the suitability of staff to be in contact with children meet legal requirements. Some legally required checks had not been undertaken and other important information was missing. The omissions had been evident for some time, but had not been spotted or acted on by those responsible for checking the register. In addition, your school does not routinely keep copies of the documents checked to verify staff's identity, as is required. By the end of the inspection, you had ensured that the register meets legal requirements. Despite these weaknesses, the school's day-to-day safeguarding practice is strong. All staff are trained to spot and share with you, as the designated safeguarding leader, any concerns they have about a pupil's safety or welfare. The staff with whom I spoke demonstrated a clear understanding of what they should do in different safeguarding situations. When staff refer concerns to you, these are taken seriously and acted on. Where necessary, you refer concerns to specialist agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the help they need. You keep comprehensive records of your communications with other professionals on these matters and ensure that the confidentiality of information is maintained and that documents are held securely. You ensure that the curriculum teaches pupils how to keep healthy and safe. This includes teaching pupils strategies to stay safe online and about how to recognise the signs of potentially abusive and exploitive behaviour.

Inspection findings

- Children in the early years do not achieve as well as they should in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Reception, children's standards in these areas of learning are consistently below average. However, in other areas of learning, children achieve just as well as Reception children nationally. While children's attainment on starting Reception can vary, most year groups include some children with poor skills in language, communication and other areas of learning. This is not the case for the majority, however. Where attainment of children in this larger group falls below what is typical for their age, it is close enough for them to catch up quickly and attain the expected standards by the end of Reception. You are currently establishing stronger links with some of the pre-school nurseries that children attend prior to coming to your school. This is to develop a shared understanding of the early years curriculum and typical attainment on entry to Reception.
- Together, we observed early years staff supporting small groups of children in writing and phonics tasks. We also observed what other children do during these periods. Teachers develop children's confidence in writing. They encourage children to listen to the sounds in words and write their suggested spellings down for them to copy. There are missed opportunities, however, to extend children's understanding of phonics and tricky words. Consequently, incorrect spellings are reinforced. Children are curious and eager to learn. Many are able to concentrate and sustain interest in activities. However, these qualities are not capitalised on to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The activities made available for children to work on independently are undemanding and limit their learning.
- At the end of Reception, too few children are adequately prepared for work in Year 1. This is part of the reason why Year 2 pupils do not attain the expected standards in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 1. We were not able to observe reading in key stage 1, but the pupils who read to me demonstrated very effective use of phonics. They read expressively and showed a good understanding of the story and characters in their books. Pupils know the purpose of different types of punctuation and how to respond to them when reading.
- In our visits to classrooms to observe pupils' writing, teachers' subject knowledge and expertise shone through. Teachers make sure that pupils know how to structure their writing, how to use vocabulary to make it more interesting and the importance of correct punctuation and spellings. Teachers fire pupils' enthusiasm to write. In the classrooms we visited, pupils were brimming over with ideas for writing about all of the information they had learned about the Titanic. Teaching assistants make a very good contribution. Following teachers' lead, they help pupils to organise their ideas, extend their sentences and write their thoughts accurately and neatly. Work that pupils had completed earlier in the year about the Great Fire of London and the opening of the nearby Mersey Gateway Bridge show that capturing pupils' interest inspires them to write. We observed some effective learning in mathematics. Reasoning and problem-solving skills have a high profile. However, the most able pupils are not routinely challenged. Mathematical ideas are not always explained or demonstrated clearly and

effectively.

- The school's duty to promote fundamental British values is being led by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable middle leader. A very good start has been made in raising the profile of these values across the school and giving pupils meaningful opportunities to understand and experience them. The leader has some excellent ideas for extending pupils' understanding of diversity and equality in the curriculum to strengthen their understanding of British values further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- by the end of Reception, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development is at least in line with the national average
- by the end of Year 2, standards in reading and mathematics are at least in line with national averages and differences between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally diminish
- work continues to develop pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, equality and the full range of diversity in modern Britain
- the administration and recording of safeguarding checks and behaviour are strengthened.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's evaluation of its work and priorities for improvement. I reviewed a range of school documents, including those relating to safeguarding and behaviour. I met with four governors and had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority.

Together, we observed learning and behaviour in the early years and key stage 1. I looked at pupils work in books and on display around the school. I held a formal discussion with a group of pupils in key stage 2 and spoke to others informally at lunchtime. I took account of 61 responses to Ofsted's online parents' survey, Parent View, including 15 written comments. I considered 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. There were no responses to the online pupils' survey.