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Mr N Carr
Headteacher
Cotmanhay Junior School
Beauvale Drive
Ilkeston
DE7 8RR

Dear Mr Carr

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Cotmanhay Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 20 June 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

Since the last inspection there have been significant staff changes. The substantive headteacher joined the school in January, initially in an acting capacity. Following the retirement of her predecessor, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) also started in January. A Year 6 teacher has been on long-term absence since February.

As a result of the inspection on 4 November 2010, 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.

The headteacher has expertly guided the school's recovery by maintaining a sharp focus on accelerating pupil progress and by galvanising the collective efforts of the staff to improve the quality of teaching. Suitable priority has been given to developing more rigorous assessment, so that pupil progress is more systematically reviewed, intervention and support are effectively targeted and the impact of the school's planned actions is properly evaluated. Training and guidance from the SENCO ensure that pupils' individual learning needs are identified and that teachers and teaching assistants provide high quality support.

Standards are rising, but progress remains uneven, notably in Year 6, which is a particularly challenging pupil cohort. However, the school's assessment information indicates that progress in English and mathematics has accelerated across all year

groups since the inspection. The increases are most evident in reading, where planned actions and targeted support for guided reading have strengthened provision.

Teaching has improved. The quality of learning was good in most lessons observed. Good relationships between adults and pupils create a positive climate for learning, and ensure that most pupils settle quickly and behave well. Teachers have to work hard to engage pupils because a small but significant minority struggle to sustain their concentration. The decision to restructure the teaching of English and mathematics has placed additional demands on teachers and teaching assistants, particularly in terms of lesson planning and management. However, there is a more consistent and focused approach to planning and delivery. Lessons present suitably challenging objectives, which are shared with the pupils, and a range of learning activities that encourage pupils to work collaboratively. In the best lessons, teachers sustain a brisk pace with skilful management, with a good balance of teacher exposition and independent pupil activity. This includes paired-talk and well-prepared group work that ensures that all pupils are actively involved in their learning. Some lessons helpfully define specific outcomes for different groups, and some use the 'steps for success' to encourage high achievement. The use of assessment is developing well in this respect. However, marking, although detailed and constructive, does not have sufficient impact because pupils are rarely given opportunity to implement the next steps that are outlined.

Leadership and management have been strengthened. Senior leaders have an accurate picture and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders secure improvement well, and have not lost focus on maintaining key aspects of provision that assure the pupils' positive engagement and well-being. Procedures for monitoring the school's work involve subject leaders and are increasingly systematic and rigorous.

The local authority has provided good support and guidance for the school. The statement of action sets out suitable priorities and actions, which are appropriately modified in the light of findings from the School Improvement Partner's visits.

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

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2010:

- Improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment information in order to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment by:
 - sharing the good practice already in the school
 - establishing a more consistent approach to planning and use of assessment in the classroom, particularly through the use of questioning
 - enhancing the impact of national assessment strategies by extending these fully to numeracy and science
 - actively involving pupils more in their learning, in order to challenge and inspire them further.

- Increase the impact of leadership and management, particularly of subject coordinators by:
 - implementing regular progress reviews to ensure that underachieving pupils are identified and the impact of initiatives to support their learning is carefully evaluated
 - implementing the action plans to provide training and development for teachers in planning lessons and work for pupils
 - ensuring all subject leaders develop the management skills, particularly in data analysis, they need to support the school's drive for improvement.