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Miss Katy Latchford
Acting Headteacher
Cotmanhay Infant School
Beauvale Drive
DE7 8RR

Dear Miss Latchford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cotmanhay Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 8 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. 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:

- identify measurable targets and points in time to check on the success of improvement actions
- ensure that information given to the governing body is clear and precise about the impact of improvement actions taken
- urgently revise the arrangements for the start of the day so that pupils begin each day safely and efficiently.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and other school documentation were evaluated. We jointly conducted two formal observations of lessons and a walk around the school which included short visits to other lessons. We spoke informally to pupils and looked at samples of their work.

Context

There have been changes to the context of the school since the last inspection. The headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term. You took up your post as acting headteacher at the beginning of the autumn term. A newly qualified teacher has been appointed to job share with an existing member of staff. She took up her post at the beginning of the autumn term.

Main findings

You have acted with urgency to identify and carry out appropriate actions to improve teaching, pupils' achievement, and their attendance and to strengthen leadership and management since taking up your post this September.

An appropriate range of monitoring and evaluation activities are being carried out by leaders at all levels. As a result, you have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your judgements matched those made by Her Majesty's Inspector when we carried out joint evaluation activities during the visit. Your improvement plans, and the plans of other leaders identify the correct actions, but they do not quantify as targets precisely enough the things that will need to be achieved if the school is to be judged securely as 'good' at its next inspection. The plans do not identify points along the way to check that they are working successfully.

You have taken swift and effective action to improve pupils' attendance. However, too many pupils arrive late to school. This is not helped by the ineffective way that the entry of pupils' and parents and carers to school is organised.

Staff demonstrate that they are keen to improve their practice. They focus on improving pupils' important basic skills throughout lessons. You have quite rightly revised the system for managing their performance so that it more closely focuses on how well all the pupils in their classes are doing. There is now a clear set of expectations as to how spoken and written feedback to pupils should be carried out and about what every classroom should contain to help support pupils' learning and to develop their independence. These are being monitored closely and evidence confirms that almost every teacher has implemented these quickly and effectively. The school's improved approach to teaching pupils the sounds that letters make (phonics), is having a positive impact on accelerating the progress that pupils make with reading and writing.

Senior leaders are carefully analysing pupils' assessment information, alongside the work in pupils' books so that extra support is targeted where it is needed most. There are early signs that gaps are closing more quickly for the most vulnerable pupils in school as a result. Your own evidence has rightly confirmed that there is still more to be done to raise the expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve, particularly in writing. The self-esteem and confidence of these pupils has already been raised by the additional activities provided for them.

The governing body have responded positively to the development points given to them at the last inspection. You are supporting governors in a more structured way to be able to check on the effectiveness of the school's work. They are coming into school more often to see the school's work first hand. The information provided to them does not always make it clear to them whether improvements are happening quickly enough to get the school to 'good'. The external review of the governing body, requested at the last inspection, is in its early stages.

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 school improvement advisor has provided useful training to improve the spoken and written feedback given to pupils and support in developing the system for managing staff performance. A teaching, learning and assessment consultant has been effective in supporting the school to make further improvements to the teaching of phonics.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector