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Simon Robinson  
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Dear Mr Robinson

### **Short inspection of Cotmanhay Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2019, 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 January 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and governors have high ambitions for the pupils and the long-term contribution they can make to the local community. The curriculum is broad and stimulating. Leaders are committed to the development of a wide range of learning in diverse areas, such as art, music, understanding of climate change and physical exercise, alongside key skills in reading, writing and mathematics. The commitment to pupils' families and the local area can be seen most clearly in the school's 'Community Curriculum' in which pupils are rewarded when they take their learning, as homework, to their families and into the Cotmanhay community.

School leaders make considered use of well-respected national research to help teachers plan the best ways for pupils to learn. This approach has led to a successful response to the previous inspection report, one of the lines of enquiry for this visit. Teaching has improved because of the rigorous monitoring carried out by senior leaders combined with the enthusiasm and commitment of teaching staff. Strengths and weaknesses are identified with clarity. Focused training then supports staff in addressing areas where the school needs to improve. Governors are highly knowledgeable about the school and they also check that their vision and priorities are working throughout. For example, carefully designed class groupings and skilful questioning and feedback by teachers have underpinned the good progress made by disadvantaged pupils in their reading, writing and mathematics over the last three years. Leaders and governors have identified the current priorities accurately.

Although very few parents and carers gave their views on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, the school regularly gathers views using the same questions. For example, a recent survey of 146 parents provided useful information to leaders and governors. This included that parents knew their child was happy and safe. Many parents enjoy coming to school events where they can celebrate their children's learning. A recent event to support reading is a typical example.

The pupils displayed impeccable conduct at all times during this visit. They were friendly and polite. In addition, their behaviour for learning in those lessons visited contributed to their progress and their clear enjoyment of what they were doing. We saw pupils who were supporting each other's learning and responding well to their teachers' questions. Pupils showed pride in their work through neat presentation, well-formed handwriting and increasingly ambitious vocabulary. They were confident and eager to talk about what they were learning, relishing the challenges offered. A group of pupils described their school as 'astonishing, amazing, tantalising, ebullient, exceptional, equal'.

Results in the most recent national tests show that pupils make good progress overall in reading and, particularly, in mathematics. Reading is still one of the school's priorities. Leaders know that reading is the key to academic success and continue to emphasise its importance. However, pupils' progress in writing has not been as strong up to this year. There have not been enough pupils who have reached the higher standard by the end of Year 6. Some pupils' progress is affected by their attendance at school. Overall absence rates are higher than the national average. Too many pupils are persistently absent from school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

As the school's designated safeguarding officer, you have ensured that staff are trained and they know what to do if they are concerned that a child is being harmed. The safeguarding policy is up to date, taking account of the most recent legislation. You ensure that safeguarding records are stored securely and that they provide a detailed account of the school's work with other agencies. Where necessary, you have taken decisive and persistent action so that vulnerable pupils receive the help they need. This has sometimes included the involvement of other professionals, such as social care or the police, where concerns justified this step.

Pupils said that they feel happy and safe in school. They said they have also been taught how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils remembered a recent assembly where teachers had acted out the risks of talking to strangers on the internet. As a result of these examples and other ongoing care throughout the school, leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and governors have made pupils' writing a key priority this year. The school has invested in a new approach, making sure that teachers are well trained so that they can work consistently across the school. Writing seen in

pupils' books showed a noticeable improvement between September 2018 and the time of the inspection. Evidence from in-school monitoring suggests that more of the older pupils are writing at the higher standard with greater accuracy and more ambitious vocabulary. Pupils themselves said their writing has improved. You have made a strong start to this work. The continued emphasis on reading will be helpful. Time is now needed so that this successful approach can support pupils to build on their writing skills as they move through the school. For this reason, it should remain as a school priority.

- Leaders have recognised that poor attendance may be the greatest barrier to success for some pupils. A variety of approaches to improve attendance have been used this year with families and with the pupils themselves. These approaches have included rewards and incentives for the pupils, discussions and stronger action where needed with parents. This work has had some success so far this year. Punctuality has improved a lot since the beginning of the year. There has also been a reduction in the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent. These pupils miss more than one day per fortnight, on average, and so are a particular concern. Absence remains higher than the national average and there are still too many pupils who remain persistent absentees.
- The school website is always checked before any inspection. It is clear and well presented with lots of useful information for parents in both written and picture or video form. However, some statutory information was missing prior to the visit. This information was available in the school itself but there were a small number of documents which were not sufficiently detailed to be fully compliant. For example, there is an equality policy but the equality objectives are not defined in a measurable way so that governors can monitor and report progress against them each year. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported while they are in school but annual information for parents lacks detail. Staff recruitment is secure and necessary evidence of checks is filed securely in the school. However, the single central record had not been fully updated with all of this information prior to the visit.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent improvement in the quality of pupils' writing continues so that outcomes improve by the end of Year 6 and more pupils reach the higher standard in their writing
- further action is taken to improve pupils' attendance and to continue to reduce the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent
- all statutory information is published on the school website and all internal record systems are efficiently and accurately maintained.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Ward  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I considered information from a range of sources, including the previous inspection report and the school's performance in national tests and assessments between 2016 and 2018. I reviewed the school's website and read a sample of policies. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and considered the school's own surveys of parents. There were too few responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, for overall results to be considered although four individual comments were taken into account. 21 staff and 15 pupil Ofsted surveys provided information which was also included. Meetings were held with you, with other senior and middle leaders, governors and a group of older pupils to discuss the school including progress since the last inspection. I considered a range of documentation including the school self-evaluation, improvement plans, information kept in school about pupils' attainment and progress and their attendance, monitoring records linked to the quality of teaching and learning, records of recruitment checks on staff and volunteers, recruitment file samples, records of actions taken to protect pupils' welfare and governors' reports on the school website. I looked at records of staff training to ensure that they were up to date and read reports provided by another headteacher on behalf of the local authority. I talked with staff to make sure they knew what to do if they were concerned about a child. You and I jointly made visits to lessons and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I looked at more examples of pupils' writing with the leader for English. I observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the day, around school and in lessons and spoke to a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 to gather their views.