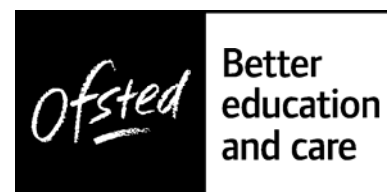


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25 January 2006

Mr D M Schaller  
The Headteacher  
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Derbyshire  
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Dear Mr Schaller

## **SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF COTMANHAY JUNIOR SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Mrs Sue Hall and Mr David Speakman, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 23 and 24 January 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in June 2005.

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

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority. They also had informal discussions with staff and pupils.

### **Achievement and standards**

Standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 have almost always been well below the national average for many years. The results of the national tests demonstrate that the pupils had made average progress overall since they took the tests in Year 2. However, progress varied between subjects; it was

better in English and, particularly, in mathematics than in science in 2003 and 2004. In 2004, the science results were poor, but they showed appreciable improvement in 2005.

Standards in the core subjects remain well below the national average, although the pupils are making satisfactory progress overall. Their listening skills are better than their speaking skills; they do not always have sufficient opportunity to use and extend their limited vocabulary in lessons. Writing skills are patchy and there are particular weaknesses in many pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers often correct the pupils' work for these faults but do not always follow up their marking to ensure that the errors do not reoccur. The pupils do not have enough opportunity in English and other subjects to write at any length, and there is an over-use of worksheets in some classes. Pupil's handwriting and presentation generally leave room for improvement and teachers do not always give a good example to pupils in their own writing and spelling.

Pupils are developing problem solving skills in mathematics well. They are able to interpret questions, develop strategies and translate words into sums. However, even by the end of Year 6, some lower attaining pupils have weak numeracy skills and are unable to accurately subtract numbers. Although the pupils make satisfactory progress in individual science lessons, not enough has always been expected of them, particularly the more able, over time. Staff have begun to develop more investigative activities but there are gaps in pupils' learning and confidence because many struggle to organise what they have to do or to explain their thinking. Improvement in information and communication technology has been good; standards are improving and pupils' computer skills are better.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2005;

- Raise standards in science and information and communication technology – progress in raising standards has been satisfactory in science and good in information and communication technology.

## **Personal development and well-being**

The school works hard to ensure that the pupils continue to behave well and that they are quiet and attentive in class and assemblies. Relationships between pupils are mostly good. They have good attitudes to school but many pupils, especially girls, do not offer their ideas and appear short of confidence. While most are keen to do well, some do not always try as hard as they might. Although they enjoy being in school, the pupils are not always enthusiastic about their lessons. Many lack confidence; for instance many do not have the skills or confidence to carry out investigations without a lot of support from adults. Staff are beginning to look at ways to develop their independence. The school takes good care of its pupils and they feel safe. However, there are insufficient procedures for ensuring that there is a daily act of collective worship in all classes, which would enable the pupils to develop their spirituality. Rates of attendance are low and are slow to improve. There is a

larger proportion of unauthorised absences than average because some parents do not support the school fully by ensuring their children attend on a regular basis. The school works closely with the education welfare office to address such issues.

### **Quality of provision**

Of the 17 lessons observed teaching was good in about a third and satisfactory in two thirds. All of the good teaching was seen in Years 5 and 6, particularly in Year 6. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in information and communication technology since the previous inspection. This is as a result of focused attention by the subject leader in collaboration with the local authority on planned development in this subject, which has developed teachers' knowledge, understanding and confidence effectively in teaching information and communication technology skills and using them to support and make teaching more interesting.

In more effective lessons teachers use a good range of teaching and learning strategies, including promoting collaborative group work, which help to make learning effective for all pupils because they value and make the most of the opportunities to work with other pupils. The best teaching focuses on pupils being active participants in their learning and on using first hand experience. In some lessons, however, there are limited opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in activities that stimulate good learning. In English, pupils are sometimes given low level copying tasks and there are insufficient opportunities to enable them to record their findings independently.

A few teachers make particularly effective use of questions when introducing lessons or at the end when assessing what pupils have learned. Too often pupils are allowed to be passive participants in their learning, especially girls. Learning activities are often too directed by the teacher and the pace is too slow, with pupils occasionally wanting to move on faster, and showing the capability to do so. Some teachers inform pupils clearly what they are expected to learn in lessons and these are displayed so that pupils have a constant reminder of the learning intentions. However, this practice is not followed consistently.

The use of assessment to inform teachers' planning is developing, but still has some way to go. It is best in English and mathematics but is not yet in place for other subjects. A good system has been developed for assessing pupils' achievement in information and communication technology skills. It is written in a clear and meaningful way, understandable by staff and pupils, ready to be implemented. There is no consistent system for recording teachers' ongoing assessments. The quality of marking in pupils' books is variable. Some is inadequate in informing pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better, simply consisting of ticks and crosses in mathematics books for example. In English there is some meaningful and diagnostic marking which clearly informs pupils of their strengths and what they need to improve.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad, but class timetables indicate that teaching time is not always used to best effect and that the curriculum lacks some balance in the time allocated to different subjects. The way the timetable is designed makes it difficult to use the time efficiently and the start to the day is not brisk. Recent curriculum development indicates that there are growing links between information and communication technology and other subjects, such as English and this is helping to add significance to learning and raise the pupils' enthusiasm.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2005

- Improve the effectiveness of assessment – satisfactory progress has been made

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher works closely with the deputy headteacher, providing a sound direction and focus on raising standards. The pastoral leadership is good, and the pupils' welfare and social development are of prime concern. The staff have worked with some enthusiasm to improve their own leadership and management skills, and some are doing so well. There is a positive team spirit and satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

The school has suitable systems for monitoring its work, so that shortcomings are identified and points are raised for improvement. These are followed up to ensure that teachers improve their expertise. The local authority has provided well-judged support to guide the staff in monitoring teaching. Teachers receive feedback based on clear evaluations of their lessons, which have an appropriate focus on the impact on the pupils' learning. The use of data for analysing standards is satisfactory and improving, so that the school has a sound basis for tracking the pupils' progress and identifying weaknesses. This information is used suitably to set pupils for work in English, mathematics and science and to provide additional support for those who need it. There is satisfactory monitoring of the curriculum, which is planned more carefully, although timetables are not checked sufficiently to ensure that there is adequate balance.

The action plan is satisfactory; the actions proposed are appropriate and urgent and there are detailed success criteria. However, the timings are rather vague, particularly for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan and the dates for achievement. It is not always clear who is to monitor progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2005

- Review and develop the roles of the headteacher, senior managers and subject coordinators – satisfactory progress has been made

## External support

The local authority has provided the school with a good level of support overall. The statement shows that it has been aware of the areas where the school needed to improve for four years and has provided support to improve achievement in English and mathematics. The proposals for further support are appropriate and there are effective strategies for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of the authority's work. There are suitable success criteria, although their effectiveness is reduced because few are dated. Local authority personnel have worked closely with the school to identify what needed to be done, to plan for improvement and to challenge the rate of progress.

## Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

## Priorities for further improvement

- The consistency of recording the teachers' ongoing assessments and the use of these to inform teaching
- The numeracy skills of the less able pupils, particularly in subtraction
- The full involvement of the girls in lessons
- The use of timetabled class time to the best effect

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Derbyshire

Yours sincerely

Mrs Pat Cox

**Additional Inspector**