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Mrs Joanne Lloyd-Williams
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Dear Mrs Lloyd-Williams

Short inspection of Finedon Mulso Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils work easily and naturally with each other and this helps them make good progress. They behave well. Pupils move around the building and outside calmly and politely. They are friendly and welcoming to visitors. Pupils are clearly proud of their school and there is no litter or any damage to equipment. You use a parent support adviser well to ensure that pupils do not miss school through absence. There is an imaginative array of early intervention strategies. The consequence of this work is that pupils come to school regularly and few are persistently absent.

Every pupil I spoke with said that they enjoyed coming to school. They thought that it was a place where they learned well and felt safe. Pupils were clear about how they keep themselves and others safe whether using the internet, crossing roads or encountering strangers. Pupils know that, if they went to an adult with a problem about themselves or a friend, it would be dealt with speedily and sensitively. All pupils I spoke with said that there was very little bullying in the school. This is backed up by the school's own documentation. A very small number of parents and carers, however, are concerned about how issues to do with bullying have been communicated to them.

Standards at the end of key stage 2 declined in 2017. This was especially true for boys in reading and girls in mathematics. Since then, you have done much good work in making sure that teachers are clear about how to assess pupils' work and plan the next steps in learning. This has led to greater accuracy of the information

you collect about how well pupils are doing. Teachers now focus on pupils providing more precise answers. They use these to provide more timely support and, where needed, intervention strategies. Pupils are now making much better progress.

The school's assessment information indicates that standards are improving in all subjects. The differences between the standards reached by boys and girls are reducing. Middle-ability pupils are more consistently making the progress expected of them. More pupils are beginning to work at greater depth, although it is still too early to be certain that this is consistent in all year groups. Work in pupils' books shows good progress. Their work is well presented. Pupils act upon the advice that teachers give and correct any misconceptions.

Despite the improvement, lessons are not consistently challenging. This is particularly true for middle-ability pupils. Sometimes tasks are not planned well enough to allow pupils to move on and grapple with new concepts and learning. This means that pupils sometimes finish their work and wait before they move on to a more demanding task. Additionally, when pupils have a choice of tasks to do, they are sometimes not sure which ones are the most challenging and which are easy. In mathematics, and especially for girls, teachers do not make the choices clear and do not give pupils the confidence to choose a more challenging task.

You have an outward-looking attitude to improvement. This means that you actively seek opportunities to bring expertise and skills into the school. You also provide high-quality training for staff through work with other schools and agencies. You are well supported in your work by the trust and by the executive headteacher, whose skills complement your own. All this is making a good contribution to how well pupils are currently doing.

The overwhelming majority of parents rate the school highly. They said that staff are approachable and keen to help them sort out any problems or to answer any questions. Many parents mentioned how happy their children are at the school. One parent summed this up when she said, 'I feel very lucky to have such a lovely school on my doorstep.' Parents value the information they receive about how well their children are doing. A few, however, believe that their child would benefit from more challenge in lessons so that they could achieve more.

Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well supported in their learning. You use additional adults in the classroom very effectively and this is a strength of the school. They are well trained and well directed by teachers, and pupils make good progress. Consequently, provision for this group of pupils is effective. You use the extra funding from the pupil premium well to ensure that disadvantaged pupils do not fall behind. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is increasing rapidly and securely. There are still differences, however, between the progress made by this group of pupils and that of other pupils nationally. Too few reach the expected standard in all three areas of reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils value the curriculum highly. They said that the 'topic web' work they do, for example 'astronomy in action' in Years 5 and 6, is interesting and engaging. They said that they enjoy being able to experience learning in depth. Pupils particularly value trips, visitors and visits that complement the topic work they do. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 gained much from a visit to Warwick Castle during their 'dungeons and dragons' topic. Pupils look forward to a popular residential trip to Sheringham with excitement.

Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They were unanimous in their belief that caring for others is the right thing to do. They are clear about different types of discrimination, whether by gender, sexual orientation, race, economic circumstance or religion. They were adamant that they would be able to recognise it and are clear that they would go to an adult in school who would stop it. Consideration of others' feelings, rooted in a clear sense of fairness, is a hallmark of the school. Pupils are proud of 'The Smile Team' which is designed to support any pupil feeling sad or lonely.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that strong systems are in place for reporting and monitoring any concerns that staff may have about the children. You have been vigilant in ensuring that a new online system does not lead to things being missed. Indeed, a member of staff commented that, where the safeguarding of children is concerned, 'nothing is too minor'.

You ensure that the process for employing new members of staff is thorough and includes relevant pre-employment checks. Governors and directors of the trust regularly and robustly monitor these arrangements. Staff and governors have also had relevant training to keep children safe. They all know how to raise any concerns they may have about a child's welfare. Consequently, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school so that children are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- One of the inspection's lines of enquiry was to evaluate how effectively boys make progress. The school's assessment information and work in pupils' books show that the difference between the progress made by boys and girls is decreasing. Boys are now making faster progress.
- Another line of enquiry was to consider how accurately teachers assess pupils' work. Leaders make good use of a range of outside partners to make sure that teachers are now more accurate in their assessment of pupils' work.
- The inspection evaluated the effectiveness of the curriculum. It is broad and balanced, and pupils highly value what they learn. They enjoy the subjects they study and the work they do helps them to make good progress. They particularly value the opportunities for learning that leaders organise outside school.
- Some of the work done by middle-ability pupils, especially boys, is too easy. It does not stretch them or challenge their thinking well enough. This happens

frequently because the tasks they work on do not allow them move on to more difficult work.

- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress.
- There are good systems in place to check that pupils absent from school are safe. The number of exclusions from school is reducing, and so is the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- The school receives good support from the trust. The executive headteacher has a clear understanding of strategies for school improvement. She uses these skilfully to challenge school leaders.
- The school is accurate and robust in its self-assessment. Leaders are committed and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors provide good challenge, which contributes further to improvement. The school uses the trust and a cluster of local schools well to bring further expertise to its practice.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers set tasks that challenge all groups of pupils, particularly those of middle ability, and create more opportunities for pupils to stretch their learning
- they share assessment information more effectively so that teachers plan work that more precisely matches pupils' abilities
- teachers promote greater confidence among girls so that they tackle mathematics more successfully and make more consistent progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust and the chief executive officer of the trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mitchley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for English and mathematics and your parent support adviser. I met three members of the governing body, including the chair. I also spoke with the

chair of the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust and the executive headteacher. I spoke with parents at the school gate as they brought their children to school in the morning. I also took account of parents' views through 37 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 33 responses to its free-text service. I visited each year group with you to see the learning that was taking place in classrooms and looked closely at a range of books to see pupils' work. I examined a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, its development plan, information about pupils' attainment and progress and documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils.