

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Julia Alison  
Headteacher  
Irchester Community Primary School  
School Lane  
Irchester  
Wellingborough  
Northamptonshire  
NN29 7AZ

Dear Mrs Alison

### **Short inspection of Irchester Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 the school was judged to be good in April 2014.

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

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

You have continued to successfully navigate the school through many changes, including expanding pupil admission numbers. You have an effective understanding of teaching and learning and know your staff well. You use this knowledge skilfully to develop the talents of other leaders. All leaders have a shared commitment to raising aspirations and improving pupils' outcomes.

Governors are well informed. You ensure that they have a clear understanding of the school. They check what is reported to them. They use their skills effectively to challenge and support you and other leaders.

Leaders have kept an ongoing focus on the recommendation from the previous inspection to improve teaching. Good teaching has been sustained despite staff changes over time. This is because leaders work well with the local authority, teaching school alliances and other organisations, to secure high-quality training. You also promote opportunities for the school to share its expertise, at moderating work and in science, with other schools. There are examples of highly effective teaching within the school. You and other leaders know where there is strong practice and are using this well to support the development of others.

The standards reached by pupils are typically close to the national averages, with attainment in reading being a particular strength. Leaders keep a close eye on areas where performance dips and take appropriate actions to improve teaching and learning. For example, in 2016, standards in writing were below the national average. Effective training improved the quality of teaching. Writing standards rose in 2017. Where there remain areas of relative underperformance, for example outcomes in writing at the end of the Reception Year, they are prioritised in the school's improvement plan.

Pupils enjoy their learning. You are developing a curriculum which promotes aspiration. Science topics across the school provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills. An example of this was a school-wide 'Tiny World' theme, where pupils' fascination with microscopes also inspired their scientific and creative writing. In addition, families were encouraged to join in the project, through a family learning challenge. Pupils also expressed their enjoyment of many other opportunities, such as sports tournaments, residential trips, music and art.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes remain strong. Pupils are well behaved and respectful of each other and adults across the school day. Older pupils expressed pride in their school and relish taking on responsibilities, including anti-bullying ambassadors, Year 6 buddies to Reception pupils, librarians and sports leaders. The school is mindful of planning opportunities to widen pupils' cultural awareness.

Parents hold you and your staff in high regard. They are particularly appreciative that the school goes 'the extra mile' to support their children's individual needs. Parents also value the wide number of opportunities that you offer to help them to support their children's learning, for example internet safety workshops, mathematics guidance and a group for parents of children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard and ensure that the welfare of pupils. You have ensured appropriate training for all staff. Staff are quick to report any concerns they have about children. Records are detailed and of a high quality.

The school is tenacious in pursuing the support that families and children need, and works constructively with outside agencies. Leaders' investment in an effective and caring pastoral team means that support for vulnerable pupils and families is a strength.

You and your staff know the pupils and families well. Pupils say they feel safe and trust adults to listen to them and help them. Leaders ensure that school values are made relevant to pupils, such as 'responsibility' for their own actions.

This has been linked effectively to attendance this term. Leaders are tireless in promoting the importance of attendance, which has kept school attendance consistently above the national average.

Pupils showed good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. Older pupils say they are feeling confident about moving onto their secondary schools.

### **Inspection findings**

- We considered together the actions you are taking to improve the progress of the most able pupils. This is a high priority on your school development plan. You have provided a range of appropriate training, for example on planning effective questioning to extend learning. Leaders introduced a new tracking system within the last 12 months and updated approaches to using assessment information. This is being used well to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving. You provide a number of additional teaching groups which are improving the progress of the pupils who are taking part. During visits to lessons, and when we looked at the work in pupils' books, we saw that not all teachers are equally skilled at helping pupils to progress as quickly as they could. Records of leaders' monitoring show that these do not consistently identify clearly how teachers can improve their teaching.
- Improving pupils' writing progress is a high priority for the school. The school has introduced more systematic planning for progression in spelling across the school. Leaders have also worked with teachers on ensuring that clearer links are being made between the grammar and punctuation skills that pupils are learning and writing tasks. Evidence gathered during the inspection showed that teachers are consistently ensuring that pupils' spelling and punctuation are more accurate.
- When visiting classrooms and looking at pupils' work in their books, we saw that writing tasks are effectively linked to interesting topics and texts. Developing pupils' range of vocabulary is also a consistently strong feature. For example, Year 2 pupils were using well-chosen adjectives and verbs to write lively descriptions about a king and his golden underpants. Teachers are ensuring that pupils are taught about age-appropriate grammar in specific practice tasks. However, teachers are not equally skilled at helping pupils to know how to use this knowledge to improve their writing and deepen their understanding.
- We also looked at how well mathematics is being taught. You have provided effective training for teachers and updated teaching materials and equipment. Staff now have a good understanding of what and how you want them to teach. Teachers effectively use models and pictorial representations to aid pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. These have led to gains in pupils' confidence in solving problems. Teachers are developing their planning and questioning to provide more opportunities for pupils to reason, explain and prove their understanding. However, teachers are not consistently planning problems with the right level of challenge, for pupils to demonstrate the skills and habits needed in order to deepen their understanding further.

- The recently appointed early years leader is having a positive impact on teaching and learning in Reception. We saw that children were engrossed in a range of purposeful and enjoyable tasks. The early years leader was skilfully enabling a group of pupils to use word banks, and their phonics knowledge, to write a thank-you letter to the fireman who had recently visited the class. The children enjoyed reading out their letters to the inspector. Another teacher was helping a group to use scientific vocabulary, as they sorted objects that would sink or float. All adults were contributing effectively to the calm, caring atmosphere. The early years leader is strengthening teamwork in the early years by involving all staff in planning and assessment.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently show pupils how to use grammar and punctuation to improve their writing and deepen their understanding
- teachers plan challenges in mathematics that give pupils, of all abilities, good opportunities to reason, explain their thinking and so deepen their understanding
- assessment and monitoring information is used more precisely to refine actions for improving teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Mandy Wilding  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, and we agreed my key lines of enquiry. I also met with other teachers with leadership responsibilities, the leader for the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the family link worker. I met with the chair of the governing body and other governors. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority. I visited lessons with senior leaders in all areas of the school covered by the inspection, seven visits in all. We examined samples of pupils' work and talked with pupils to evaluate the quality of their learning.

I spoke with a group of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour across the school day, at breakfast club, breaktime and during lessons.

In addition, I scrutinised a range of the school's documents, including those relating to pupils' progress, the school's improvement planning, its self-evaluation and documents relating to safeguarding. I spoke with 15 parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 43 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and 35 responses to Ofsted's free-text service. There were no responses from staff or pupils to consider.