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Mrs Jan Marshall  
Headteacher  
Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School  
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Dear Mrs Marshall

### **Short inspection of Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2017, 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 May 2010. The school converted to an academy and became part of the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust in April 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team have created a friendly and harmonious learning environment in which staff work closely together. Pupils are happy in school and parents are supportive. Parents speak highly of the care and quality of learning their children receive. As one parent commented: 'Staff are kind, caring and eager to bring out the best in every child.'

You have a clear plan for continued school improvement. Your plans and vision for the school are shared with governors and staff. Your leadership team is strong and works hard to make sure priorities for improvement are successful. You provide appropriate support and guidance to staff and other leaders to ensure that the plans you make and implement are raising standards for pupils in your school. You have received effective support from the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust which has provided staff and members of the governing body with helpful opportunities to share ideas and develop skills.

You have ensured that teaching is at least good in all classes by regularly visiting them with other leaders. You check that pupils are learning well by scrutinising the progress they make in their work. You carefully track the attainment and progress of all pupils. Teachers know what pupils need to learn next in order to make progress and they provide appropriate challenge. Additional support is promptly

provided to pupils when needed, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You recognise the strengths of your school and have detailed action plans to address the areas for improvement. You have focused on improving provision in the early years to ensure that children are provided with opportunities to develop their learning outdoors. As a result, provision is stimulating and provides children with exciting and imaginative learning activities, including the development of their physical skills. Early years provision encourages boys and girls equally to practise and apply their skills in writing, reading and numeracy. New leadership and effective teaching in the early years have secured improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The data that leaders provided for me shows that children are now making good progress from their starting points.

Pupils' overall attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was below the national average for the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for age. You and your leadership team responded by reviewing the curriculum and identifying areas where pupils did not do well. You have successfully trained staff and reviewed teaching strategies, so improvements have been made this year. Pupils are now better supported by skilled staff and with specific interventions. Teachers make sure that pupils are now appropriately challenged to achieve a greater depth in their understanding. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are improving for all groups of pupils. However, you are aware that standards in writing are not as high as they could be because pupils' handwriting, spelling and presentation have shortcomings. You have identified improving these skills as an ongoing priority.

Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average overall. However, published data indicates that, for some groups of pupils, attendance is not as high as it should be. The number of pupils in groups with low attendance was small and you could explain why their attendance was low. The leadership team and family support workers have a good understanding of the families within your community. You work well with external agencies to support pupils to attend school regularly. Nevertheless, you are aware that there are hard-to-reach families within your community. Your aspiration to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by low attendance is key to your continued efforts to raise attendance and further improve pupils' overall achievement.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. You make sure the safeguarding of pupils is effective and a high priority. The required checks are made, so staff are suitable to work with children. Staff and governors receive the appropriate training, including protecting pupils from extremism and radicalisation. You and your staff know pupils exceptionally well, and so are alert to the things that make them vulnerable. Staff are vigilant and records show that you take decisive and prompt action when it is needed to secure pupils' well-being.

Pupils are confident and happy in school. Pupils with whom I spoke said they felt safe in school. They told me that bullying and name-calling are rare, but when it does happen staff deal with it quickly and fairly. They feel well cared for by staff in school. Pupils know how to use the internet safely and could explain to me how they can keep safe, especially in relation to strangers.

### **Inspection findings**

- The majority of children enter the school with levels of attainment that are lower than those expected for their age in most areas of learning, but particularly in literacy. Nevertheless, good teaching means they catch up quickly, with teachers placing particular emphasis on developing children's communication, reading and writing skills. Provision is planned to meet the needs of boys and girls. Children do particularly well in developing their understanding of mathematics through active problem solving. Although the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in 2016 was below the national average, it was an improvement on the previous year and current data indicates further improvements in 2017.
- The attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1 was broadly in line with the national average until 2015. Last year, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard or above in reading, writing and mathematics was significantly lower. This was due partly to some weak teaching when the pupils were in Year 1; therefore, some pupils were not adequately prepared for the expectations of Year 2. It was also due to a considerable number of these pupils having external circumstances that affected their progress. Teachers worked unstintingly to help these pupils make progress in Year 2 but this was not enough to ensure that an at least average proportion of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, achieved the expected standard.
- You know your school well and give teachers clear advice to help them to improve. Teachers work well together to share good practice and are determined to do the best for the pupils in their care. The school is part of the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust and has a good relationship with the cluster of schools within the trust. Teachers and leaders, including governors, work well together with colleagues from other schools to check that their assessments of pupils' progress are accurate. In addition, the school works closely with the Pilgrim Learning Trust, which has provided effective support and guidance to leaders and governors.
- Pupils' skills in phonics are rapidly improving. Your focus on a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics has ensured that outcomes for current pupils in Years 1 and 2 are on track. You use the pupil premium funding and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that these pupils make good progress through a reading improvement programme.
- Pupils' books, including children's learning journeys, demonstrate that the majority of pupils make good progress from their different starting points. Additional support is in place for pupils who need help to catch up. Challenge for the most able pupils is evident in their work.

- You identified mathematics as an area for improvement, particularly to ensure that more pupils achieve a greater depth of understanding. Focused staff training by leaders has been successful in raising expectations. Pupils' workbooks show significant progress across all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. There are more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills through problem solving, and pupils are encouraged to explain their answers.
- Pupils are developing their writing skills by writing in a variety of ways for different purposes, and their skills in grammar and punctuation are improving well. However, teachers do not yet consistently set high expectations for handwriting, spelling and presentation so that the quality of pupils' writing can improve even further.
- Attendance was in line with the national average overall, but persistent absence was high for specific groups of pupils. Current attendance figures for these pupils are much improved, and in some cases no longer an issue. However, leaders, including governors, have recognised that efforts to engage parents with prioritising attendance need to be maintained to ensure sustained improvement.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress and attainment in writing are further improved by teachers setting consistently high expectations for handwriting, spelling and the presentation of pupils' work
- the current progress of all pupils is sustained through high-quality teaching and learning so that pupils' outcomes are at least in line with national expectations
- the regular attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils, remains a high priority and is rigorously addressed.

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

Stephanie Innes-Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the chief executive officer of the Irthlingborough and Finedon Learning Trust, the acting deputy headteacher, the majority of your middle leaders and two family support workers. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and I met with a group of pupils. I also met with the chair of the governing body.

We visited classrooms together and we looked at a range of pupils' work from the early years and key stage 1. We discussed the progress of different groups of pupils and the school's plans for improvement. I considered the responses of parents from Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, information regarding procedures for safeguarding and monitoring of behaviour, information on how the pupil premium is spent, and a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding and behaviour. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and out on the playground and in the lunch hall. I checked the school's single central register to ensure that it met current safeguarding regulations.