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Mrs Joanna New
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Dear Mrs New

Short inspection of Flitwick Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 2 November 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 the school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Your strong and incisive leadership has ensured that the school has continued to improve and that pupils thrive both academically and socially. Flitwick is a warm and caring school, where all pupils are valued as individuals. Pupils are happy, well behaved and enjoy their learning. The school's values and ethos of being a 'hive of learning' are evident in all aspects of school life. Parents are delighted with both the quality of education their children receive and the approachability of all staff. One parent typically commented: 'My children have enjoyed and continue to enjoy school because of the balance between nurturing and providing challenging learning. I would definitely recommend Flitwick Lower School to others.'

Effective leadership at all levels ensures that although there is still work to be done to further improve the school, you identify any areas that need to be improved and address these quickly. The structure of your leadership teams allows all staff to be involved. You have a clear and accurate picture of how well the school is performing and strong plans for future improvement. This is shared by all staff, who feel well led and are passionate and enthusiastic in their approach to their work. This has ensured that all areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed.

Members of the governing body are highly skilled and are regular visitors to the school. These visits, together with meetings with leaders, staff and pupils, ensure that governors have accurate information about all aspects of the school and are therefore able to challenge and support leaders effectively about how well the school is doing.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Those spoken to engaged confidently and enthusiastically with me. They told me that they enjoy their learning because teachers plan interesting topics which help them learn. For example, pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 have been learning about North America which has provided many opportunities for them to develop their skills, particularly in writing. Pupils enjoy their topic homework. Homework displays are of high quality and allow pupils to show the skills they have developed. You and your leadership team ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and provides opportunities for pupils to learn how people with different faiths and cultures live, for example when learning 'the language of the month'. Pupils also benefit from 'philosophy for children' sessions, which help to develop their ability to reflect on the world around them.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that there is a culture of effective safeguarding at the school. All adults are carefully vetted and procedures for safer recruitment are followed rigorously. Regular and up-to-date training ensures that all staff understand procedures and what to do if they have any concerns. Parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire are confident that the school is a safe and secure place.

The caring and vigilant culture ensures that pupils are kept safe and feel secure. Pupils understand bullying but told me that there were very few times when 'people are unkind to each other'. They are confident that if they have any concerns, adults will sort these out. Parents I spoke to during the inspection said that they were not aware of any bullying. The curriculum helps pupils to develop their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They understand the potential risks when working online.

You have effective systems in place for recording any concerns that staff have. Records are detailed and meticulous. Where necessary, you act quickly to involve external agencies appropriately.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to ascertain whether the improvements and positive outcomes seen in 2016 had been sustained. You shared the most recent information about pupils' attainment and progress in 2017 and we looked at pupils' learning and progress across the school.
- At the end of the early years in 2017, the proportion of children who achieved the expected good level of development rose further and is above average for 2017. This continues the upward trend since 2015. We saw that children in the early years classes are well settled and that they benefit from good provision

both inside and out. Children's differing needs are well met and this is enabling them to make good progress.

- Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check improved in 2016 to average and this has been maintained in 2017. In classrooms across the school, reading areas help to promote a love of reading. Pupils enjoy using the brightly coloured and well-stocked library. They apply their phonic skills well to help them read.
- At the end of Year 2 in 2016, the proportion of pupils who achieved age-related expectations was slightly above average for reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion exceeding age-related expectations was above average in reading and writing and in line for mathematics. In 2017, outcomes are equally positive for the proportion of pupils reaching age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils exceeding these expectations has increased to above average in all three subjects. You also shared with me information relating to pupils' work and progress in Year 4. Outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 4 in 2017, when they transfer to middle school, indicate that they have made good progress since the end of Year 2.
- Work in pupils' books and internal school tracking information indicate that pupils across the school are continuing to make good progress and are on track to maintain these standards this year. You have identified that not all pupils spell accurately and that this is an area for development to ensure that their attainment and progress are even better. You have also identified that pupils' presentation is not consistently good and that there is a need to improve pupils' ability to quickly recall number facts, such as multiplication tables. Your leadership teams have appropriate plans to bring about improvements in these areas.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out how well the school has addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection and whether there is capacity for continued improvement. At the time of the previous inspection, the school was asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to work by themselves. When we walked around the school, we saw groups of pupils in all year groups working independently as well as in pairs, groups and supported by adults. The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities to develop all aspects of pupils' learning, including their ability to work independently.
- The school was also asked to develop the role of teachers in charge of subjects so that they all play a part in checking the quality of teaching and learning. In response to this, you have developed leadership teams across the school for different areas. These teams include teachers, teaching assistants and governors. Consequently, leadership is stronger because it is distributed across a wider base and is better able to check the quality of teaching. The leadership teams I spoke to were very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas and are skilled and enthusiastic.
- Both areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been successfully addressed and the school is very accurate in its identification of strengths and areas for improvement. This means that there is good capacity for continued and sustained improvement.

- My next key line of enquiry was attendance. This is because in 2016 overall attendance was below that nationally and the absence and persistent absence rates for some groups of pupils was high. You shared information about the attendance of individual pupils. This showed that the relatively high persistent absence rates were due to the absence of a very small number of pupils. You have robust procedures in place to follow up on absence and to encourage all pupils to attend regularly. There are rewards for high attendance, and newsletters remind parents about the importance of regular attendance. The school monitors the attendance of all pupils closely and makes timely contact if any child's attendance starts to slip. Because of the actions taken, current attendance overall has improved and is in line with that seen nationally.
- My final line of enquiry related to how well the school meets the needs of different groups of pupils. This is because at the end of 2016, some pupils who were disadvantaged or who had special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities did not achieve as well as they should. You provided comprehensive tracking information and analysis of the attainment and progress of different groups within the school. Together we looked at the books of a number of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- It is clear that where there are differences between groups of pupils, these are mainly related to the specific cohort. Your internal analysis shows that any gaps between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils are narrowing. Work in pupils' books shows that those who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points, as are those who are disadvantaged. We saw that these pupils are well supported during lessons, both by teachers and additional adults. Consequently, they make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- implement existing plans to improve pupils' spelling and presentation in order to raise standards in writing still further
- improve pupils' knowledge of their number facts and multiplication tables in order to improve pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, leadership teams, all teachers and four members of the governing body. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority. You and I visited all classrooms together to observe teaching and learning and looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects. I met with a group of pupils to talk about their experiences at school and also spoke with pupils during break and lunchtime.

I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for safe recruitment of staff. I considered a wide range of other documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its work, plans for improvement and reports to governors. I also evaluated documentation in relation to pupils' attainment and progress.

I took account of 52 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 45 comments received electronically. I also spoke with 18 parents when they were delivering their children to school. I further considered 23 responses to the staff questionnaire.