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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Lisa Feldman
Headteacher
Finchingfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Vicarage Road
Finchingfield
Braintree
Essex
CM7 4LD

Dear Mrs Feldman

Short inspection of Finchingfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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.

Finchingfield Primary School is a positive and welcoming place. Staff and pupils are friendly, polite and demonstrate respect for each other. As a very small village school, all staff know the pupils and families well; it is like a big family.

Pupils say that their school is a special place where they take good care of one another. Younger pupils enjoy mixing with the older pupils. Older pupils say that the school is a lovely fun place where the adults help them to do the best they can. They are happy at school and feel well looked after.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of this school. Many of them went out of their way to explain the good support that their children receive. Parents particularly value the care staff show towards their children. They are also pleased with the progress that pupils make and the variety of after-school clubs available. One parent said, 'Children run into school because they are so excited to learn here.'

You have a good understanding of both the strengths of the school and the areas that need to improve. You took up the post of headteacher in September 2015, and were the fourth headteacher to join the school within a 14-month period. The considerable

staffing changes across the school have provided opportunities for you to appoint staff who have specific skills and expertise to attend to the areas that you have identified as priorities for improvement. Consequently, you have established a strong, effective team who are all working effectively towards securing further improvement.

The local authority has supported and challenged you effectively. You have diligently acted on their advice and this has helped you to develop and improve the provision for all children and pupils further.

An interim governing board was put in place to enhance the improvement at the school further. As a result, the governing body has been re-established. Under the direction of the new chair, governance is now a strength, and is supporting the school well. Governors appropriately challenge you to continue to move the school improvement journey forward.

In addition, you and all leaders work closely with the Braintree Area School Led Improvement Partnership. Your focus on collaboration with this local school group is ensuring that initiatives undertaken are appropriate, purposeful and mindful of the needs of the children and pupils at Finchingfield.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong safeguarding culture runs through all aspects of daily school life. You, your staff team and the governing body ensure that the safeguarding of pupils is always of the highest priority.

Staff, governors and volunteers are vigilant and proactive. Records are of a high quality and are well kept. The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy which staff understand; they know what to do if they have any concerns.

Leaders work effectively with agencies, parents and carers to keep all pupils safe and so all are well looked after. In particular, leaders are very sensitive to vulnerable pupils' needs and take great care to ensure that these pupils are closely monitored. For example, a case study we looked at showed the exceptional support that has been given to a pupil in your care. You told me, 'We do for these children what we would do for our own kids.'

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, especially when accessing the internet and online. Parents are kept up to date with how to support their children online at home with tips in your weekly newsletter and online safety parent events.

Pupils told me that they know whom to go to if they are unhappy, and feel that their concerns are quickly dealt with and resolved by staff. Subsequently, pupils feel safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry for this inspection was to explore how effectively the school promotes good attendance for all pupils. This was because attendance was below the national average in both 2015 and 2016.

- Leaders, including the governing body, take pupils' attendance very seriously. Where pupils do not attend as often as they can, the school is quick to ensure that attendance improves, and that other agencies are involved if needed. Within your small school, the staff know families well; this is not used as an excuse for non-attendance, but has helped to swiftly, and accurately, identify where support is needed. As a result, the latest attendance information for 2017 shows that pupils' attendance is now at least in line with the 2016 national average. You are continuing to do all you can to ensure that pupils attend as often as they should so this further improves.
- The next line of enquiry related to the effectiveness of provision for learning skills across the curriculum subjects. During the preparation for this inspection, there was limited curriculum information on the school's website, including the effective reporting of the impact of the spending of the most recent physical education and sports premium funding. In addition, in 2016, achievement in science was lower than the national average.
- You explained that the website was in the process of being updated. By the time I had completed the inspection, you had ensured that all the paper documents I had seen were available on the school's website so that it was up to date with the latest information.
- During our visits to classrooms we saw evidence of good-quality science investigation in all classes, including the use of fair testing. For example, pupils in Years 2, 3, and 4 talked enthusiastically about their beans growing and how successful their fair tests had been. They demonstrated a secure understanding of scientific enquiry. You have established a popular 'mad scientist' after-school club that gives pupils further opportunities to explore and develop scientific skills. Pupils talked enthusiastically and with scientific precision about what they had been able to explore.
- The profile of physical education (PE) and sport has been raised across the school due to an effective use of the sports premium grant. The participation in sports outside of PE lessons has improved, for example, the school equestrian after-school club won a national horse riding competition. The PE coordinator is making sure that, as a small school, the pupils are not disadvantaged, by being fully represented and involved in externally run competitions.
- As a result of good-quality modern foreign language provision across the school, Year 2 pupils welcomed us confidently in French during a maths lesson and the written French work we saw in pupils' books was of a consistently high quality.
- You have rightly identified the depth of coverage of the curriculum as an area to further develop. A new framework has been put in place to further enhance provision. This is to ensure that pupils have more time to explore and ask probing questions. Consequently, the evidence seen demonstrated that most pupils make strong progress from their starting points across a wide range of curriculum subjects.
- My next line of enquiry was to look at pupils' achievement in mathematics and reading. As a very small school, due to small cohorts, the published data can vary widely from year to year, and had in recent years for these two areas.
- The school's reorganised mathematics curriculum meets the higher expectations that are required. As a result of focusing on reasoning and problem-solving during the previous year, more pupils are able to articulate their thinking about maths. Leaders

introduced a range of strategies to consolidate and reinforce pupils' basic number skills, which we were able to see being used very effectively in all year groups. Pupils spoke about how they are using the strategies to support their learning and that they enjoy mathematics, that they had high expectations for themselves to be mathematicians.

- Although progress in reading was below the national average in your most recent unchecked results for 2017, you had already shown you have taken steps to focus on this. Leaders used their monitoring to implement a range of actions which have rapidly helped pupils increase their vocabulary and, subsequently, improve their fluency.
- The leaders also focused on raising the profile of reading with both pupils and parents. For example, the youngest children visit the local library and have a sensory storyteller weekly. You are continuing to work with the community to instil the love of reading. For example, a Year 6 pupil spoke about how he has been inspired to read all 100 books that have been identified that pupils should read before they are 12-year-olds. You identify and acknowledge that the focus on reading must be continued to ensure sustained progress over time, to ensure that pupils make the progress that they are capable of.
- The final line of enquiry during this inspection was to check how leaders are improving the quality of teaching and learning. This was an area you were tasked with to improve from the previous inspection report.
- Leaders' and your own monitoring paperwork demonstrate that you all check the quality of teaching regularly and provide teaching and support staff with incisive feedback to help them improve. Governors work with leaders to scrutinise pupils' work and assessment information to identify any areas of development.
- Leaders at all levels are skilled and contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of the school improvement plans. As a result, any weaknesses are recognised and rectified swiftly. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is consistently effective, and continually improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress continues to quicken so that a greater proportion of pupils consistently attain the expected standard in reading
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to develop so that pupils attain consistently well in all curriculum areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Cassandra Williams
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, school leaders and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a representative from the local authority and another from the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Together, you and I visited all classrooms and saw pupils at their work. I analysed a range of school documentation, including information about the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I considered the 29 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to parents at the beginning of the day. Some parents offered written responses, which I also considered. Additionally, I met with pupils from Reception to Year 6 and gathered the views of other pupils throughout the day. I also took into account the 12 staff and 13 pupil questionnaires.

Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents, including the school's website, published performance data, the school improvement plan and a summary of your school's self-evaluation document.