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9 October 2017

Mr Mark Eager  
Principal  
Brixham College  
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Dear Mr Eager

### **Short inspection of Brixham College**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2017 with Ofsted Inspectors Justine Hocking and Paul Winterton, 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 2014.

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

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

The school continues to improve as a result of your good leadership. You maintain a strong focus on your values, which are to serve the whole community. You also have a clear-sighted and pragmatic approach to raising the quality of teaching and learning across the school. As a result, parents and pupils are very supportive of their school and of the work you and your staff are doing for pupils.

You have built an experienced and cohesive senior leadership team. You have developed a strong team ethos that draws the best out of your colleagues and, consequently, you work together effectively. The senior team has an accurate understanding of the school's performance and you are working together successfully to strengthen it. Your approach to leadership has also motivated teachers and other staff, who are universally proud of their school and the work they are doing.

Governors also contribute significantly to the strength of leadership. They understand the school well and work closely with senior leaders to analyse the school's strengths and weaknesses and monitor the progress the school is making.

The last inspection report asked you to address two issues in particular. These

related to lower-than-average levels of attendance and the achievement of boys. You have responded well to these challenges. Improving levels of attendance has been a priority for school leaders since the last inspection and it remains so today. Your staff chase up absences diligently and work with the local authority to challenge those who are persistently absent. Of particular note is your development of the role of 'attendance champion', an experienced middle leader who works with pupils who have poor attendance and with their families. A notable strength is the way he works with individuals to overcome their particular barriers to attendance. As a consequence of your work, levels of attendance have improved overall. They have also improved for disadvantaged pupils. However, the school's levels of attendance are still below the national average and you are aware there is more to do to fully address this issue.

As a result of the emphasis leaders have placed across the school on the achievement of boys, this is slowly improving. Leaders are rightly focusing on raising the expectations that boys have of themselves from the moment they enter the school. There has been a clear focus on training teachers to challenge low expectations and this is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the school. There is also good, effective, work going on to motivate those boys whose commitment to learning has been weak in the past. Boys are now making better progress in key stage 3 because of the higher expectations of new national curriculum programmes of study. Those boys with weaker reading skills are also making improved progress as a result of the additional help they receive. However, boys are still making slower progress than girls in key stage 4. This is largely the result of their weaker writing skills. In subjects where there is less writing, for example mathematics and science, the boys are now doing as well as girls. The gender gap is at its largest for the most able. In English language GCSE in 2017, for example, the grade 7+ pass rate (previously A to A\*) was five times higher for girls than boys.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, the governors and your leadership team have made keeping pupils safe your highest priority and as a result there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Pupils, parents and staff all have confidence that pupils are kept safe. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, both in the real world and online. They know who to go to should they have any concerns. Pupils treat each other well and are calm and mature as they move around the school site.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and that effective and appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors. Staff are well trained and they understand the importance of reporting any concerns they have. There are good relationships between school leaders and external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Parents report that communication with school staff is good and that their children receive the support they need.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the day, we agreed that this short inspection would focus on the performance of the most able, leaders' work in addressing underperformance in particular subjects and the quality of provision in the sixth form.
- There is a wide-ranging training programme in place for teachers to give them the skills to challenge the most able pupils effectively. This is resulting in some significant improvements to the quality of teaching. Teachers are increasingly setting activities that encourage the most able pupils to think more deeply about their work and not settle for superficial answers. In science, for example, pupils are being given complex tasks that challenge them to extend their thinking. Pupils' rates of progress are increasing as a consequence. Pupils also comment on the effectiveness of homework research tasks in science as a tool to encourage them to explore topics in greater depth.
- Teachers across a number of subjects are using good questioning techniques to encourage the most able pupils to think more deeply about their answers. The focus on the most able is resulting in increased rates of progress across all year groups. 2017 examination results also show an increased number of the highest grades, particularly in English.
- While much good work is going on to raise the level of challenge, not all the tasks set are effective in challenging the most able. Sometimes when teachers set 'stretch' activities, they are not substantially different from the work set for other pupils. Leaders are aware of this and know that there is more work to be done to embed these techniques effectively across the whole school.
- Senior leaders work effectively with middle leaders to ensure that subjects are well led and pupils make progress in every subject. Senior leaders use a wide range of techniques to check on the quality of teaching and learning in each subject and middle leaders are held accountable for the results their departments achieve. Middle leaders are well trained. In particular, they value the opportunities they get to make a broader contribution to the school via secondment opportunities. This has improved their range of skills and their ability to lead their departments. A further strength is in the use senior leaders make of the surveys they undertake with pupils. These surveys prove very useful in making sure new teaching initiatives are having the intended impact.
- Over the last few years, some subjects have performed less well than others. In particular, GCSE results in languages have been significantly lower than they should have been. Governors and leaders were rightly concerned and they have taken strong and decisive action to remedy the issue. They analysed why the results were poor and strengthened the senior leadership team in response. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved markedly, GCSE results in 2017 improved significantly and the number of pupils who choose languages as a GCSE option has increased substantially. This is a real success story for the languages department and for school leaders.
- The sixth form has evolved over the four years since it began. The progress that students make is improving each year. The quality of teaching is good. Students value the expert subject knowledge of teachers, particularly in science. Teachers monitor progress closely and intervene to support students where necessary.

- The programme of study is good. Students have access to good pastoral support and they value the enrichment opportunities open to them. They have access to suitable work experience opportunities and are well supported with careers advice and guidance.
- The sixth form is currently only meeting the needs of a section of the school's Year 11 leavers. Leaders express an ambition to meet the needs of all the young people in the school's area. However, the sixth form offers a limited range of courses. Leaders are aware that if they are to meet the needs of all their pupils they will need to review the provision and consider how they might address the issue.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance continues to improve so that it at least reaches the national average
- the performance of boys continues to improve so that, through teachers focusing on improving standards of literacy for boys, it matches that of girls
- sixth-form provision meets the needs of the school's pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, Ofsted Inspectors Justine Hocking, Paul Winterton and I met with you, senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. I spoke with a senior local authority officer. We visited lessons with senior leaders to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding, attendance and the use of the pupil premium funding. We took into account 98 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, 80 written comments by parents and responses to questionnaires completed by 74 pupils and 66 staff.