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Mr Brett Miners  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Miners

### **Short inspection of Falmouth School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 November 2016 with Non Davies, Ofsted Inspector, 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 June 2012.

#### **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 made significant changes in order to continue to improve leadership and teaching skills to bring about further improvement in school outcomes. You and your senior team are rightly proud of the better achievement that most pupils are making. You are acutely aware of the areas that require further work and have plans in place to address any weaknesses.

The changes you have made have been wide and far-reaching. You have recruited a new senior leadership team who bring a mix of skills, that they have used effectively to bring about the necessary school improvement. As a result, Falmouth School is a calm and orderly place where most pupils are making good progress.

You have changed, and continue to change, the curriculum so that it best meets the needs of each year group. You, your leadership team and governors set the highest expectations and aspirations for all of your pupils and the students in the sixth form, in order that they achieve well. Almost all pupils are rising to the challenge but these high expectations are not always as well understood by parents.

More than half of the staff responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Almost all staff think that the school has improved since the previous inspection and the vast majority said that they are proud to work at the school.

Pupils' performance at key stage 4 continues to rise. In 2016, examination results

show rapid improvement in some subjects, such as science, where achievement was not previously as strong. Similarly in the sixth form, students are making good progress now in almost all subjects. The retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13 is high and more than half of the pupils continue to university once they complete their studies at Falmouth School.

In 2016, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally. This was a decline from previous years when this group had been improving. This was most acutely seen in the most able pupils who are also in receipt of pupil premium funding. Your team has responded quickly to ensure that the current progress of disadvantaged pupils is much closer to their peers, who achieve better than other pupils nationally.

The most able pupils make progress in line with their peers nationally; however, they do not make as rapid progress as pupils in school who have lower starting points. This was an area for improvement at the previous inspection, and while standards have risen, you recognise that they could be even higher. You have already identified this as an area of focus for the school in 2016 and have appointed a dedicated leader to improve the outcomes for the most able pupils in all years. You recognise that this will require investment in teachers' professional development and governors have allocated resources for this.

Boys in key stage 4 make good progress; however, their rate of improvement is not as good as that of the girls. In the sixth form, boys achieve well. Adjustments to the curriculum and literacy development programmes are examples of leaders' work to improve boys' achievement in this key stage. These activities are beginning to have a positive effect but it is too early to see the impact. You are, rightly, keeping the impact of initiatives closely under review.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified improving the quality of teaching across the school as an area for development. You and your leadership team have worked tirelessly on ensuring that the climate for learning is right and that the systems used to improve teaching and learning are able to identify and address shortcomings quickly. Consequently, there is much more consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. This can be seen most evidently in marking and feedback. The 'blue slip' system is used well by all staff and pupils value the feedback and stretch challenges that they are set to accelerate learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe from harm. The systems used to check potential employees' suitability are rigorous and governors are particularly diligent in fulfilling their safeguarding duties in this important area.

Staff with specific responsibilities for safeguarding are fastidious in the attention they give to pupils who face challenging circumstances or are at risk of harm or exploitation. Staff have completed all of the appropriate training, including safer

recruitment and training in the 'Prevent' duty. They use their training to identify pupils at risk and referrals are made in a timely fashion to the appropriate authority.

The designated lead for safeguarding is assiduous in checking that any referrals to the local authority are appropriately followed up. The same is true of referrals made under the 'Prevent' duty. There are robust systems in place to prevent any pupil going missing from education. Staff ensure that safeguarding records are well maintained.

Staff responsible for attendance have ensured that very clear systems are in place to monitor and track any pupil absence. They use a wide range of sanctions to try and improve pupils' attendance. This has had some positive impact, but the number of pupils in key stage 4 who are persistently absent is still too high. More work to build relationships with families is required to ensure that they understand the importance of regular attendance and the impact that their child's absence has on learning.

### **Inspection findings**

- Disadvantaged pupils currently in school are achieving well. This is in sharp contrast to the key stage 4 results in 2016, which showed disadvantaged pupils achieving markedly less well than other pupils nationally, especially the most able disadvantaged pupils. This was substantially due to the low levels of achievement of disadvantaged pupils who had attended alternative provision during Year 11. Consequently, you have improved the provision made within school to better meet the specific needs of those pupils who find learning difficult. Only those with the most complex needs attend alternative provision, either at Acorn Academy Cornwall (Community & Hospital Education Service) or ACE Schools Plymouth.
- In all year groups the differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are diminishing and in the younger years there is no difference between disadvantaged pupils' performance and others. Rigorous and robust tracking and monitoring allow you to identify the specific areas of the curriculum where pupils need additional help. The Framework for Improving Pupil Progress (FIPP) scheme is providing effective support to help disadvantaged pupils overcome the barriers to their learning. You are aware there is more work to do here to improve their outcomes, particularly of the most able disadvantaged pupils, even further.
- Boys are achieving better outcomes; however, their rate of progress is not as rapid as that of the girls. The mentoring of some boys, especially in key stage 4, by senior leaders is now in place but it is too early to see any impact. You are aware that there are some local reasons for the gender disparity in performance and recognise there is more work to do with the community and with boys' parents to overcome some of these issues. The new sporting facilities which are being developed by the school have been designed, in part, to boost boys' performance and to raise their aspirations and their self-confidence.
- In the sixth form, boys are achieving well. In almost all subjects they achieve at least as well as other pupils nationally from their differing starting points. An increasing number are completing their studies in the sixth form and a rapidly increasing proportion go to university, including some of the more prestigious ones.

- In 2016, the most able Year 11 pupils achieved in line with national averages. Pupils with lower starting points achieved better than their peers nationally. Your own data and work seen in books show they while the most able are making better progress they continue to achieve proportionately less well than other pupils in key stage 3 and 4. You recognise this as a priority for the school and have appointed a lead practitioner to support teachers better in challenging the more able pupils to achieve the very highest grades. She is being supported in her work by the newly formed teaching and learning team. Some of the best practice in the school, such as in science, is being rolled out to other subjects.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are strong. Pupils who spoke with inspectors commented how well the behaviour policy is working and this means that they feel safe and can concentrate better in class. Your work to reduce exclusions, particularly the formation of the inclusion room, has met with some resistance from a small number of pupils and some parents. Nevertheless, the impact is positive and pupils are making good progress as school staff are able to make sure that they keep up with the work they need to complete when withdrawn from lessons. I visited the exclusion room and spoke to the very small number of pupils who were studying there. All were clear about their misdemeanours and were working industriously. They believe that the school is helping them to recognise what is, and what is not, acceptable, and as a result they intend to change their behaviours.
- Attendance continues to run very slightly below the national average. Your team has used a range of strategies to try and improve this but the measures used have been mainly punitive. More work is needed, on a proactive basis, to build and further improve relationships with families and the wider community to help them better understand the good work and rising standards that pupils at Falmouth School are achieving.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide the most able pupils with the opportunities to achieve the highest grades
- communication with parents and the wider community is enhanced to:
  - improve further the outcomes for boys, so that they match those achieved by the girls
  - reduce pupils' absence from school, especially for those who are persistently absent.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors observed learning in classrooms and visited the canteen and outdoor areas to observe pupils' behaviour. All lesson observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. We looked at pupils' work and talked to them to seek their views about their learning. Inspectors looked at a sample of books from across the school and heard Year 8 pupils, of differing abilities, read. We met with three groups of pupils from different years to talk about their experience of school. Meetings were held with senior leaders, the designated leader for safeguarding and attendance, the assistant headteacher with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils and three governors. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation and development plan, safeguarding and child protection records and the school's assessment information. Inspectors took into account the views of 106 parents who responded to Parent View and the 65 staff and 19 pupils who expressed their views through Ofsted's online questionnaires.

This short inspection focused on:

- the school's work to improve the attainment and progress of the most able pupils
- determining the difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally
- the achievement of boys
- pupils' attendance and their safety.