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Miss Tracey Amos
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Amos

Short inspection of Great Torrington School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2016 with Chris Hummerstone, 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 May 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, supported by governors, have recruited a new senior leadership team to continue the journey of improvement at Great Torrington. This has included a number of new roles, such as a dedicated leader for pupils' personal development.

You have made a number of significant changes to the curriculum, not least the introduction of the Thursday afternoon 'enrichment and intervention' programme which pupils were most enthusiastic about. They appreciate the range of opportunities and the level of challenge they face, for example when coding as part of the computing course.

The learner's baccalaureate, introduced in 2013, is now a well-established curriculum for Year 7 pupils which gives them the skills they need to learn successfully. Pupils who have benefited from this curriculum are able to express themselves very clearly and show resilience when they face setbacks.

At the previous inspection you were asked to improve the quality of teaching across all subjects. You, supported by your assistant headteachers, have made good use of staff development to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff value the time they have to do this and the opportunity to work with colleagues to improve their performance. As a result, in the vast majority of subjects outcomes have risen as the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

has improved. From your monitoring you are acutely aware of the subjects where this has not been fully realised. You have provided support to help teachers rise to your high expectations and continue to do so, for example in design and technology.

You were also asked to embed and extend the development of pupils' literacy and communication skills across the curriculum. In most subjects, pupils now write at greater length and with increasing complexity. You have identified that there is still work to do to improve the precision of their writing, particularly using correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Inspectors agree.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's systems to keep pupils safe underpin the wider culture of safeguarding.

Your leaders who have specific safeguarding responsibilities are well trained and clear about their responsibilities. They have developed well-thought-out strategies for supporting pupils in school who are at greatest risk of harm. At the same time, the school's work has resulted in all pupils being aware of the risks they may face. They have been alerted to threats to their safety, such as the risk of extremism, drug abuse and sexual exploitation.

When your staff are concerned about a pupil, they are swift to raise this with the designated safeguarding leader. He is clear about the range of ways pupils can be supported and makes referrals to other agencies when it is appropriate. You use 'early help' very effectively. When it is necessary to make a referral to the local authority, the referrals are timely and demonstrate the need for the referral. Your team is assiduous in its monitoring of cases that have been referred to social care and insists on escalation when the team is not satisfied with the response.

Your staff are also clear about the risk pupils face from extremism and radicalisation. They make referrals when they are concerned and police have appreciated the information the school has provided to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- The most able pupils are making good progress generally; however, in a few subjects they are not reaching the highest grades. You, your staff and governors are determined to raise pupils' aspirations. They benefit from the wide range of enrichment and intervention ('E&I') activities every week as well as the visits to universities which your team plans for them. Destination information shows that increasingly, more pupils go to university after they complete their 16 to 19 study programme. A number progress to high-quality apprenticeships because local companies work well with the school to develop pupils' employability skills.
- The most able pupils who are also disadvantaged make the same good progress as their peers and in some subjects, such as English, achieve better. Overall, the most able disadvantaged pupils achieve better than other pupils nationally.

- Your work to improve the outcomes of all disadvantaged pupils has also been successful. Differences are diminishing and progress of this group is now in line with other pupils nationally at the end of key stage 4. Both you and your deputy headteacher show a detailed understanding of each pupil's needs and the barriers that need to be overcome for them to achieve well. Careful monitoring means that interventions are timely. You make sure that disadvantaged pupils can participate in events and visits which widen their horizons to future careers, and also contribute to them being well prepared for life in modern Britain. While disadvantaged pupils are achieving better and their outcomes continue to improve, we agreed this is still not as good as you want.
- Boys are making good progress in most subjects. There have been some poor results in the past in a small number of courses in key stage 4 which more boys have followed. You have taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these areas which has been successful in the main. This is most obviously seen in computing, where you have adapted the curriculum and improved the quality of teaching to meet pupils' needs better. Engineering and design and technology remain a concern for you and your senior team are working with staff in these subjects to secure better outcomes for current pupils.
- In a wider range of subjects, however, some boys do not show the same positive attitudes towards their work as the girls do. In the large sample of pupils' work we looked at there were far more instances of incomplete work, poor presentation and inaccurate grammar, punctuation and spelling in boys' work. They do not show the same pride in their written work. Nonetheless, they are very articulate and confident. They are making good progress but the lack of care they sometimes show is preventing them from doing as well as they could in some subjects. Those boys who read to the inspector did so with good accuracy and fluency. Their understanding of the text was strong.
- The progress that disadvantaged pupils and boys make is still variable across subjects. In a few subjects, including geography and mathematics, inconsistencies exist in the rates of progress for small numbers of pupils. The greatest consistency exists in English and history, where teachers' expectations are high.
- Inspectors spent some time reviewing the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your inclusion leader is very clear in her role to train and advise staff on how to provide the best support for these pupils. She holds staff to account for the outcomes of this group and deploys additional resources available to her when needed. Her leadership of the learning support assistants is strong. Parents with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were unanimously positive in their comments about the school's work for their child. One wrote, 'I have found this school to be supportive and actively seeking ways to alter teaching to provide more ways for my child to access the curriculum. Teachers and staff are positive in their approach providing many opportunities regardless of disability.'
- The transition of all pupils, but particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, from primary school is a strength. Parents who responded to Parent View commented, 'The whole transition from primary to secondary is really good, especially the transition camp and days spent in school.' Similar arrangements are now in place for pupils moving on to 16 to 19 study

programmes or apprenticeships. Consequently, more of them complete their programmes of study.

- The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and also those who were in receipt of free school meals has been lower than that of other pupils in the past. This has improved recently and the attendance of current pupils in these groups is now in line with the national average.
- In all areas of the school, the work to keep pupils safe is strong. The good relationships with other schools, the local authority, 'early help' services, healthcare providers and the police mean that there is a good understanding of the risks that pupils face and the ways in which they can be protected. Governors are committed to strengthening this even further. They have enhanced this important area of the school's work as seen, for example, in the appointment of an additional safeguarding and welfare officer.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of work and rates of progress that pupils make are as good in all subjects as they are in English and history
- teachers insist that boys produce work that is of the very highest standards of presentation, completeness and accuracy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. 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 joined by members of your senior team. Inspectors looked at a large number of pupils' books from a wide range of subjects and across most year groups.

One inspector heard pupils of differing abilities read. We met with two groups of pupils from different years to talk about their experience of school. Meetings were held with senior leaders, the designated leader for safeguarding, the inclusion leader and four 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 73 parents who responded to Parent View and the 49 staff and 90 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, including those who are also disadvantaged
- determining the difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally
- the achievement of boys
- the outcomes achieved by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- pupils' attendance and their safety.