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30 June 2017

Mrs Zelma Hill  
Principal  
Pool Academy  
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Cornwall  
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Dear Mrs Hill

### **Short inspection of Pool Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 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 April 2014.

### **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 provided strong and determined leadership through a difficult period for the school. During this time your experience and skill have been tested to the full. You have restructured the leadership team in recent years and appointed several new senior leaders. All staff understand your high expectations because, working closely with governors, you have established clear performance indicators for the school. You and your senior leaders are working hard, and successfully, to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Staff at all levels support your steadfast conviction that pupils of all backgrounds will be welcomed and given the chance to do well academically.

In 2016, pupils' progress across a range of subjects matched the national average. Consequently, pupils of all abilities reached standards of attainment which were as good as those achieved by pupils with similar starting points in other schools. As a result of actions taken to support them, disadvantaged pupils' progress was in line with the progress of other pupils nationally last year. Pupils, particularly those who start with lower attainment, make good progress in English. You have ensured that the curriculum allows pupils to succeed in a wide range of other GCSE subjects. For example, pupils attain well in art, resistant materials and electronics.

The school is an orderly environment. Inspectors saw many examples of respectful, good-humoured behaviour both between pupils and between pupils and staff. You are passionate about maintaining the inclusive nature of the school. Pupils from ethnic minority groups receive help from staff with specialist experience and language skills. These pupils feel well supported; they develop understanding quickly and make good progress as a result.

You have successfully improved the quality of pupils' written work since the previous inspection. Pupils' books show that they take care over their work and pay attention to detail. We found many examples of well-presented written work. For example, in mathematics, pupils are able to construct graphs of quadratic functions accurately. Pupils display pride in their school. Uniform is worn smartly and the site is well maintained.

In 2015 pupils made strong progress in mathematics; however, last year pupils' progress fell to below the national average. You acted swiftly to secure new leadership in the department. A senior leader incisively identified priorities for change and planned action which has accelerated pupils' progress. In the past, pupils' progress in science lagged behind their progress in other subjects. New leadership in this area has led to an improved curriculum and better teaching. Consequently, current pupils' progress in science is now strong. Pupils' attendance has been below average in recent years. You recognise this as a key improvement priority for the school. Senior leaders have improved pupils' punctuality; however, actions to improve attendance have only recently begun to have an effect.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have made sure that policies and procedures are in place to protect pupils, and these are regularly and thoroughly reviewed. You have commissioned external scrutiny of your procedures and this has given you further reassurance that they are fit for purpose. You make timely referrals to other agencies when the need arises and keep very detailed records of the actions that result.

Pupils who spoke to us during the inspection, from all year groups, said they feel safe at school. Leaders convey strong messages to pupils about how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including internet safety. Lessons and assemblies are regularly used to reinforce messages about anti-bullying. For example, several pupils commented on the effectiveness of recent anti-bullying work led by the police. Parents are generally supportive of the school's efforts in this area. The large majority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, would recommend this school to others.

You have ensured that all staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures. Governors, senior leaders and staff are well informed and receive regular updates. Consequently, staff recognise their responsibility to be vigilant and report any concerns.

## Inspection findings

- To judge if the school remained good, one of the key lines of enquiry focused on current pupils' progress in mathematics. Pupils' progress dipped in this subject last year, having been strong in previous years. As a result of leaders' actions to improve teachers' planning, teaching is now tailored more effectively to individual pupils' needs. Teachers have a more accurate picture of pupils' knowledge and understanding because they are making better use of exam board assessment materials. This is allowing teachers to further refine the activities they use and intervene quickly when pupils fall behind. Although these assessments have sharpened teaching, at times the results are not communicated to pupils clearly enough. Some pupils do not understand how well they are doing and how much progress they have made.
- A second key line of enquiry concerned the quality of teaching and learning in science. In 2016, pupils' progress in science was below the national average. Pupils who started with middle and high attainment, in particular, did not make the progress that could be expected of them. Therefore, a lower proportion of these pupils attained GCSE grade C or better in science subjects than seen nationally. Leaders have simplified the curriculum in science by removing early entries and reducing the combinations of subjects being studied. Pupils now have a better balance of subjects and more time to study them. Teachers, several of whom are new, are well motivated and readily pass on their enthusiasm to pupils. Consequently, pupils' attitudes are positive and their progress is now much better than in the past. Individual science teachers have developed many good ideas and teaching techniques. However, the pace of improvement is sometimes slowed because these good ideas are not yet shared and developed widely enough within science and across the school.
- Another key line of enquiry looked at the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance. Governors and senior leaders have set pupils' attendance as a key priority this year. Leaders track pupils' attendance in great detail and follow up with court action in some cases. Among many initiatives, leaders have increased the profile of praise and rewards for pupils who have good attendance. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has fallen this year, particularly for boys and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' punctuality has improved, and fewer pupils are regularly late for school. Despite these signs of improvement, overall attendance remains below the national average. Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve attendance, but they accept that this is an area that still needs further work.
- Leaders are aware of the challenging behaviour of a small minority of pupils. The school's procedures for dealing with low-level disruption are effective in most cases; however, some teachers do not apply the procedures rigorously enough. This leads to some inconsistency in the standards of behaviour expected.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the system for reporting assessment outcomes in mathematics is reviewed so that pupils clearly understand how much progress they are making
- good teaching practice established in science is shared and developed within the science department and across the school
- rates of attendance are improved by working more closely with parents of the minority of pupils who find it difficult to come to school regularly
- the school's behaviour policy is consistently applied by teachers in all subjects.

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

Paul Williams  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we held meetings with you and with senior leaders. I met with the chair of the governing body and several other governors. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We held meetings with pupils from the student leadership team, key stage 3 pupils and Year 11 pupils, and we spoke with many other pupils informally. We made observations of learning across the school, looked at examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. We scrutinised a variety of documents including the school's own evaluation of its performance, assessment information, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. We took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from staff, parents and pupils.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the school since the previous inspection is under investigation by the authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.