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Mrs Kathy Haig
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Haig

Short inspection of Burford School

Following my visit to the school on 10 May 2018 with Patrick Harty, Ofsted Inspector, and Peter Rodin, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. As headteacher, you are passionate about wanting the very best, well-rounded education for all the pupils in your care. You are well supported by senior leaders, who are enthusiastic and determined to take the school to the next level. As one parent commented, 'All staff clearly have our children's welfare as their core focus and it is evident that they want our children to achieve.' The governing body has good knowledge of the school and is effective in providing support and challenge to you. Governors are ambitious for the future development of the school and are engaged in estates planning for the long-term future.

You and your senior leadership team have ensured that the GCSE and A-level results have continued to improve since the previous inspection. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 4 or 5 and above in English and mathematics was well above the national rate for the past two years. Results in mathematics have remained strong, and the results in English were particularly impressive in 2017. Similarly, the results in the sixth form have maintained a steady trajectory of improvement and were significantly above average in 2017.

Pupils behave very well, both in lessons and around the school. They wear the school uniform with pride, and are respectful and courteous to one another and to adults in the school. Staff have good relationships with their pupils and there is a positive and harmonious atmosphere around the site. As one parent said, 'The

school has a culture of breeding good behaviour and is vehemently against any form of bullying. The teachers are wonderful and very caring.'

You encourage pupils to be individuals and 'follow their dreams'. There is a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, including activities such as horse riding, as well as many sports clubs and musical ensembles. Pupils said that there were plenty of trips and other enjoyable activities. Pupils also valued the way the boarding school provision ensures that they come into contact with pupils from other countries. They are very proud of this international aspect of the school community. All pupils have access to the careers adviser, and sixth-form students spoke warmly of the guidance they are given in preparing for life after school. The guidance programme is thorough and well planned.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified the need to raise achievement further so that it is outstanding, especially in key stage 3 and Year 12. You were also encouraged to make sure that boys' progress accelerates so that they achieve as well as girls. The leadership team has taken effective action to deal with those recommendations. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum offer to ensure that pupils have a wide range of suitable options. They have supported teachers in reviewing the skills and knowledge they teach to match the needs of all pupils, and especially to include topics that boys will enjoy equally. This work has shown impact in the progress boys make in English. Boys are achieving in line with expectations in Years 7 and 8, but there is still more work to be done in Year 9. Leaders presented internal performance information which shows that Year 12 students are making good progress towards their targets for A level. The sixth form is a real strength of the school.

Leaders know there is more work to be done in ensuring that all subjects perform as well as the core subjects of English and mathematics. You have provided good-quality external support for the science department and modern foreign languages in order to ensure greater quality in teaching and learning. You have changed the curriculum in science so that more time is available for the GCSE courses, which now start in Year 9. However, the impact of this work is not yet completely embedded, and some inconsistency was still observed during the inspection. Not all teachers were able to articulate the school's priorities as laid out in the school development plan. You acknowledge that this documentation could be more sharply focused, with clear evidence of what success will look like and better guidance about lines of responsibility. Governors need to monitor the progress of these priorities more frequently than they do currently.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a widespread culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders ensure that policies and procedures are updated and they monitor implementation. Staff have regular training in a variety of topics that ensures they are well informed.

Leaders have good links with local primary schools so that they can fully support vulnerable pupils on their arrival at secondary school. Leaders provide information evenings for parents and carers, and recently ran a well-attended talk on adolescent mental health.

Pupils feel safe. They say that bullying is very rare, and if it were to happen, it would be dealt with quickly by staff. They know how to stay safe and assess any risks they may face, including online. Most parents who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire agree that their children are safe in school, and 94% would recommend the school to another parent. Staff monitor incidents of bullying and they swiftly intervene where necessary. Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school at breaktimes.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements, inspectors looked at specific aspects of the school's provision. These included: how effectively the curriculum meets the needs of pupils (especially boys and disadvantaged pupils) so that they are well prepared for their GCSEs; the quality of teaching and learning across all subjects; the strength of sixth-form provision since the previous inspection; and the ways in which leaders maintain high levels of attendance and reduce exclusions.
- There is well-planned provision for pupils in key stage 3. Pupils who need extra support to catch up with their peers in Year 7 are well supported. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making good progress and regularly attend school. School leaders recognise that disadvantaged pupils have not always had their needs catered for. Pastoral leaders now create pupil profiles for the most vulnerable so that staff know those pupils well. The extra support from teachers or teaching assistants is tailored to individual pupils' needs. Internal performance information shows good evidence that disadvantaged pupils are performing at the same levels as their peers in Years 7 and 8. However, leaders are aware that more work needs to be done in Year 9, and with some disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4, so that they can reach the same high attainment as other groups in the school.
- The previous inspection report asked the school to improve teaching to match the very best in the school. Leaders have a thorough system for appraising teaching which also includes observations with middle leaders. You are very clear on the strengths and areas of weakness, and this was confirmed by what inspectors observed during the inspection. Governors are attached to different subject departments, and they use their committee structure to hear regular presentations from a wide variety of staff who work in the school. As a result, governors know the strengths and areas of weakness of the school. They ensure that resources are targeted at subjects that need more support. Governors have a wide range of experience and professionalism, which they bring to bear in holding leaders to account. While senior leaders and governors are very clear on the improvements to be made, the school's development documentation is overly detailed, and it is easy to lose sight of the most important priorities within it.

Governors agreed that a more sharply focused summary would help them in their oversight, and that school leaders would benefit from more frequent formal reviews with governors about how the school's priorities are progressing.

- In all year groups, the pupils have access to a wide range of subjects with an emphasis on solid foundations in English and mathematics. Leaders have now introduced leisure and tourism in key stage 4, as some pupils, boys in particular, wanted to follow this course. Departments are reviewing their set books with a view to ensuring that they are equally attractive to boys. Inspectors did not notice gender differences in the way pupils respond in lessons or the amount of work covered in books. Boys are performing as well as girls in Years 7 and 8, but a gap is still evident in Year 9, which leaders are working to reduce. Leaders are offering a wide range of interventions, but the impact is not yet sufficient in Year 9.
- There are many effective teachers in a wide range of subjects who provide interesting and varied lessons. As one parent said, 'The school is a credit to the hard work and dedication of the staff.' The department leaders support one another well and share good practice. However, more support is needed to improve the provision in modern foreign languages. Similarly, science is not yet reaching the high attainment seen in the two core subjects. Leaders have provided some external support for modern foreign languages and science, but further work is required.
- In the sixth form, students are fully engaged in their learning and are exceptionally positive about the guidance they receive from their teachers. The programme of guidance is well organised. It includes a good range of external speakers, which provides a wide perspective for the students. The performance data used by the school shows an increasing proportion of subjects with strong progress scores. The school offers a wide range of level 3 courses, most of which are A levels, but students are also offered a more vocational option as well.
- Inspectors observed some excellent practice in sixth-form lessons. Students feel very well prepared for examinations and this is reflected in the strong outcomes. Inspectors saw some examples of very effective feedback from teachers to students in books, in line with school policy. Students spoke very warmly of the pastoral support, the academic mentoring, and the advice and guidance offered to them when preparing for higher education and other routes. Inspectors agree that the advice and guidance provided are of high quality. Students also have access to a wide range of enrichment opportunities.
- Attendance continues to be above the national average, including for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Pupils behave very well at school and they are respectful of one another and the adults around them. Pupils said that they are motivated by the positive behaviour points system and they are very clear about the sanctions for poor behaviour. Pastoral leaders provide a range of effective support for pupils who find it more difficult to regulate their behaviour. Consequently, exclusions have continued to reduce. Leaders have established effective procedures to support new pupils who join the school part-way through the year in this area where many Armed Forces families are based.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for pupils who are disadvantaged improve to match those of their peers with similar starting points
- rigorous checks on teaching and learning continue to further reduce variation in outcomes for a small number of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Beverley Murtagh
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documentation, including self-evaluation, development plans, assessment information, sixth-form documentation, and documents relating to safeguarding. They visited 29 lessons and three tutor times, often accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work, and spoke with a range of pupils, including boys, some disadvantaged pupils, and sixth-form students.

Inspectors took account of 58 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire, 186 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and 181 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as over 100 written responses. The lead inspector spoke with governors, and had a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner.