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2 February 2018

Anita Hems  
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Dear Mrs Hems

### **Short inspection of Devonport High School for Girls**

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Deirdre Fitzpatrick and David Herbert, 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 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

As a result of your highly effective leadership, Devonport High School for Girls has developed a vibrant culture of learning. The members of your senior leadership team provide you with exceptionally strong support in your constant drive for excellence. The school has tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection very successfully. The work of middle leaders is now a strength of the school and the quality of teachers' questioning has improved as a consequence of targeted teacher training. Your relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching has led to rapid improvements in the progress that pupils make by the time they reach the end of key stage 4.

Nonetheless, there is no sense that the school is resting on its laurels. You are keenly aware that further work is required to ensure that pupils make the same exceptionally good progress in all subject areas at key stage 4 as they do in English and humanities. In addition, progress in the sixth form for the most able students is an area that you continue to focus on. This refusal to settle for anything but the very

best is further testimony to your strong leadership and that of other senior leaders. Governors play an important role in setting the strategic goals of the school and developing its ethos. They are very well informed about the school's work and have a very good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Governors make particularly effective use of their link governor roles with specific departments to inform their oversight of the school's work. Governors have a very clear vision of the school educating the whole child, as well as securing excellent academic outcomes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school has a highly effective and well-developed culture of safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's designated safeguarding lead provides extremely strong direction to the school's work to keep pupils safe. She is meticulous in ensuring that all staff have up-to-date training and understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The school works well with external agencies but is not afraid to challenge them in order to protect pupils from harm.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection's first line of enquiry looked at how successfully leaders ensure that teaching sustains the rapid improvements in pupils' progress at key stage 4. The persistent focus on improving the quality of teaching runs through all the school's work and is thoroughly shared by leaders at all levels. Teachers make particularly effective use of the skills of their fellow teachers in a collective endeavour to improve their teaching. For example, the quality of teachers' questioning has improved as a result of focused training. Questioning is now very well used to assess, probe and develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching is very strong. They have an in-depth understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, what they have done to improve it and the impact their actions have had. Senior leaders provide highly effective support to middle leaders in their drive to improve teaching in their departments.
- As a result of this work to develop the culture of teaching in the school, pupils make exceptionally strong progress across all subject areas at key stage 4. In the GCSE examinations in 2017, pupils' overall progress was in the top 10% of all schools. Progress was particularly strong in English and humanities, where pupils achieved a whole grade higher than pupils nationally with the same starting points. Progress in all other subject areas was significantly above the national average, although not quite as high as in English and humanities. Although small in number, disadvantaged pupils achieved at significantly higher levels than other pupils nationally and outperformed their peers in the school.
- The second line of enquiry pursued by the inspection team was the impact of middle leadership. Development of middle leaders was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection in 2013. School leaders acted swiftly and successfully to address this area and middle leadership is now consistently effective. Middle leaders have a thorough and sophisticated understanding of their

areas of responsibility. The roles of pastoral leaders, such as heads of house, have been redefined to ensure that they also focus on supporting pupils' academic progress. Subject leaders play a crucial role in the school's successful drive to improve teaching. In particular, very effective links are made between subject leaders. This mutual support has been crucial in improving the consistency of middle leadership across the school. Middle leaders feel well supported by senior leaders and feel that the training they receive, for example in analysing information on pupils' progress, is very good.

- The inspection's third line of enquiry looked at the effectiveness of the 16 to 19 study programmes. As it is in the rest of the school, leadership of the sixth form is strong. It is characterised by a very thorough understanding of strengths and areas for development in the post-16 provision. As a result, students follow well-designed programmes of study that prepare them effectively for the next stage of education, employment or training.
- In 2016, the value added on A-level courses was below the national average, as was the attainment of the most able. The leadership of the sixth form reacted positively to this dip and significant improvements took place in 2017 following enhanced monitoring and the development of teaching. Students' progress improved in 12 of the 15 A-level subjects the school offers. Particularly strong improvement took place in chemistry, history, geography and religious studies. The sixth-form leader has very clearly developed plans and processes to address those subjects that did not improve. In 2017, those students who had entered the sixth form with an average grade of an A or above at GCSE made progress at the same rate as similar students nationally. Students with an average grade of a B at GCSE did very well and made significantly better progress than the national average.
- The final line of enquiry considered the quality of individual support provided to pupils. You identified this as a particular strength at our initial meeting and we agreed that this would be a useful aspect of the school's work to look at. The programme of individual support is impressively and enthusiastically led. Early identification of pupils who need academic or pastoral support is at the heart of this work and the school has invested heavily in bringing in external support services.
- In conversation, pupils say that they find accessing the support they need easy. They are particularly clear about how willing teachers and other staff are to give of their time to help pupils outside lessons. The assistant headteachers in charge of the individual support programmes meet regularly with subject leaders to review the progress of pupils receiving individual support. This close tracking helps to ensure that any interventions that take place are having a positive impact.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching improves further at key stage 4 so that the good progress that pupils already make in mathematics and science rises to the extremely high levels they make in English and humanities

- teaching of the most able students in the sixth form improves further so that their progress matches the high levels of progress made by other students with lower starting points.

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 Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspection team met with you and other senior leaders at the start of the day to draw up the key lines of enquiry that we would follow during the rest of the inspection. Inspectors visited lessons, often jointly with senior leaders, and observed learning, talked to pupils and looked at their work. In addition, inspectors met with groups of pupils and students in the sixth form. Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders throughout the day. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair. Inspectors examined a range of documentation relating to the school's work, including safeguarding. When making their judgements, inspectors took into account the 111 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.