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Ms Emma Reynolds
Principal
Frome Community College
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Dear Ms Reynolds

Short inspection of Frome Community College

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 2018 with Malcolm Davison, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since taking up your post in September 2017, you have made substantial improvements to the leadership and management of the school. You restructured the leadership team. Leaders' responsibilities are clear and they align closely with the school's improvement priorities. You bring direct and purposeful leadership. This has improved communication between staff within the school and maintained good staff morale, even though there have been several redundancies in recent years.

Pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, was around the national average in 2017. The most able pupils' progress was above average and these pupils continue to make strong progress this year. Pupils receive good support from their teachers. Teachers know their pupils well and provide individualised help for them. For example, pupils are offered extra revision activities in many subjects. You have ensured that teachers' expectations of pupils' conduct are high. Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is generally good. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen significantly since September.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve several aspects of the sixth form. Leaders have been successful in some of these areas. For example, students take responsibility for their learning and use their study time effectively. Students' academic progress rose quickly and was well above the national average in 2016. However, last year it fell back, and you recognise this as an urgent priority

for improvement. The school was also asked to improve teachers' use of assessment information so that teaching is focused on clear, suitably challenging objectives. The school has achieved improvements in teaching, and you have built on these to further improve teachers' ability to assess pupils' attainment accurately.

Although the majority of pupils make strong progress, disadvantaged pupils' progress has been weak in recent years. The school's use of additional funding for this group has not had enough impact on their learning. You have raised teachers' expectations of these pupils and so most, but not all, are now making better progress. The least able pupils' progress was below average in GCSE English last year. You have taken action to improve these pupils' achievement in English. This has been successful for most pupils. However, you accept that many Year 9 pupils need to improve their literacy skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are suitably detailed. Senior leaders' work is effective because they know the needs of pupils and their families. For example, their efforts to improve the attendance of pupils from the traveller community have been successful, because staff have taken the time to understand these pupils' needs.

Senior leaders are continually seeking improvements to safeguarding procedures. For example, they have introduced identity lanyards for sixth-form students. Senior leaders communicate well with other agencies, such as the police, and so pupils receive the support they need quickly at times of crisis.

Pupils and sixth-form students feel safe. They say that they are listened to by staff and so feel settled and happy at school. They say that bullying of any sort is rare, but it is dealt with well by staff if it does happen. Most parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey agree. Pupils receive suitable guidance on the risks they face, such as the risks of using social media, through regular assemblies and other activities.

Senior leaders promote clear messages about safeguarding. Posters around the school remind all pupils and staff how to get help or raise concerns if they are worried about the welfare of a pupil. Staff receive suitable training, and regular briefings ensure that a vigilant culture is maintained.

A new chair of the governing body was appointed in September 2017. The governing body has reorganised its working practices since that time. The current committee structure allows efficient oversight of key areas of the school's work. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's performance, and you and senior leaders are held to account effectively. For example, governors are forthright in challenging senior leaders over the rates of attendance and the progress of particular groups of pupils.

Inspection findings

- To decide whether the school remained good, the first key line of enquiry centred on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. For the previous two years, disadvantaged pupils' progress has been weak and so these pupils' attainment at GCSE has fallen well short of that of other pupils nationally. The leadership of this area of the school's work has been given a higher profile this year, and so all staff now recognise that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is a high priority. As a consequence of effective communication between teachers, individual pupil profiles are used well to identify and overcome particular barriers for these pupils. Disadvantaged pupils currently in Years 9 and 11 are now making significantly better progress, but those in Year 10 are not achieving as well.
- Following the previous inspection, the rate of pupils' attendance was around the national average. Last year, it fell sharply. In response, senior leaders have introduced better systems for recording and following up on pupils' absence. They have halted the decline overall and reversed it for some groups of pupils, for example boys and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not attend school regularly enough. Governors and senior leaders recognise that the rate of girls' attendance is not good enough. The proportion of girls who are persistently absent from school is too high.
- The second key line of enquiry evaluated the least able pupils' achievement in English. In 2017, the least able pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, was in line with the national average. However, in GCSE English these pupils' progress was much less than that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Senior leaders have ensured that teachers provide extra help to develop pupils' reading skills in all year groups. Because teachers now use better assessment procedures, this extra help is targeted well to reach those pupils who need it most. Consequently, the least able pupils' reading ability has improved and so more of this group are on track to attain grade 4 or better in GCSE English than was previously the case. Some pupils' literacy skills are weak when they transfer to the school at the beginning of Year 9. Senior leaders are aware that improving these pupils' reading and writing ability remains a priority.
- A third key line of enquiry considered the academic progress of sixth-form students in science and social science subjects. Students' progress in A-level physics, chemistry, biology, law and sociology fell sharply in 2017. This contributed significantly to the reversal of the school's position, from well above the national average to well below in one year.
- New leadership in the science faculty this year is improving the consistency and quality of teaching in science A-level subjects. Students are typically able to explain the key concepts they are learning about. They are given frequent opportunities to think deeply about ideas in science and so they are making good progress. However, current students' progress has not improved to the same extent in the social sciences. In A-level law, sociology and psychology, students are not attaining at the level they could reasonably be expected to.
- The large majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey are satisfied with the quality of education the school provides. Some parents are

concerned about the high level of staff absence in recent years, particularly in the sixth form, but many praise the dedication of staff. One parent's comment is typical:

'I have three children at Frome College, all very different types of learners with different needs. They have all been well supported and well taught with teachers who are caring and committed to their students.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils in Year 10 are given further support to help them make better academic progress
- disadvantaged pupils' rate of attendance improves
- the proportion of girls who are persistently absent from school reduces rapidly
- teachers work with local middle schools to achieve better continuity of literacy skill development during the transition from Year 8 to Year 9
- teachers' expectations of sixth-form students' capabilities are raised in social science 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 Somerset. 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, senior leaders and middle leaders. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We made observations of learning across the school, jointly with senior leaders. We looked at examples of pupils' and students' work. We held meetings with key stage 4 pupils and sixth-form students and we spoke with many other pupils informally. 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 behaviour and attendance. I considered two phone calls from parents. We took account of responses to questionnaires from 34 staff and 51 pupils. We considered 106 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.