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Stuart Worden
Principal
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Dear Mr Worden

Short inspection of BRIT School for Performing Arts and Technology

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Shaun Dodds and Timothy Williams, 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 March 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, your leadership team, governors and staff have a shared passion and dedication for this unique provision, whose ethos of 'original, ambitious, responsible' permeates the life of the school. You are rightly proud of the school's achievements to date, in particular the legacy of professionals whose talents you have developed and who continue to be held in high esteem by the creative and performance industries. You embrace students' individuality and provide a nurturing and highly ambitious environment for them to flourish creatively, socially and emotionally. As a result, many make outstanding progress, particularly in their chosen 'strand', and go on to highly successful careers in the performing arts, media, art and design, and technology industries.

Students feel very proud and privileged to have achieved a place at the BRIT School. Consequently, they are highly motivated and keen to prove their talents and achieve their ambitions. They work collegiately together to produce high-quality performances, exhibitions and productions, with the support of specialist staff and professional facilities. The vast majority of parents and carers are highly complimentary about your school and the impact it has had on their child. As one parent typically said, 'BRIT school is as good as it gets.' Another commented, 'a truly amazing educational experience'. From the large proportion of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, many were keen to cite the changes they had

seen in their child since arriving at the school. Comments such as 'It's ignited his passion' and 'It has transformed my son's life' were typical.

Following the previous inspection, you took decisive steps to address the areas identified as needing improvement. You reviewed and restructured leadership responsibilities and focused on improving still further the quality of teaching in some GCSE subjects. As a result, pupils' attainment has improved and progress in subjects such as English is now significantly above the national average. However, you and your team are not complacent. You know that further work is needed to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress from their starting points across all GCSE subjects.

Your governors are highly experienced, knowledgeable and strategic. While justifiably proud of the school's achievements, they have an accurate understanding of the areas requiring further development. They have already implemented a number of actions to address recent financial challenges and curriculum changes and to accelerate pupils' progress in some GCSE and A-level subjects. Governors provide a high level of effective challenge and support to you and your team. They share your ambitions for the school and, together, you have an appropriate plan to achieve these.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your designated safeguarding leads rightly prioritise the importance of keeping pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form safe. You are knowledgeable about the prevalent risks they may face in the wider community, and are aware of the complicated and long journeys many undertake to study at your school. You effectively manage the large and open site, ensuring that regular risk assessments keep students and staff safe.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that staff training in this area is regular and of the highest calibre. As a result, staff are highly vigilant in identifying any signs that may indicate a pupil or student is at risk. Staff are aware of the complexities of issues facing young people, including gang affiliation, knife crime, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. You are currently focusing on educating students about the impact of drugs on their lives, sexual harassment and consent, and peer-on-peer abuse. You encourage performance as a means to highlight some of these issues. For example, Croydon police department has recently commissioned a group of Year 13 students to produce and take on tour a community play about the impact of knife crime. You have arranged for more staff to undertake mental-health first-aid training in conjunction with your drive to improve students' resilience and emotional well-being.

Your highly effective personal, professional development programme ensures that pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form benefit from a designated weekly session that prepares them for life in modern Britain and for work in the performance industry. You have created what one parent described as 'a safe space for young people to express their creativity'. This innovative and artistic

environment provides countless opportunities for students to reflect on their social, moral and emotional development.

You and your team are resolute in the drive for equality of opportunity for all. Creative individuality is encouraged. Consequently, you have cultivated a community where each student, irrespective of their background, sexuality, gender or race, thrives in a safe and stimulating environment. Any form of bullying, including homophobic bullying, is not tolerated. Students demonstrate absolute respect for, and genuine interest in, the views and opinions of their peers and teachers.

You rigorously check on the suitability of staff to work at the school and keep careful records that meet statutory requirements. When necessary, you work closely with external agencies to ensure that students receive timely and appropriate support. Your recent focus on improving attendance has proved successful.

Inspection findings

- Post-16 programmes of study continue to be outstanding. You and your staff are rightfully proud of your achievements in this area.
- The breadth and quality of vocational courses ensure that exceptional numbers of post-16 students achieve the highest grades and progress to further training, education or employment within the performing and creative arts sectors. Your staff are highly trained – many are industry professionals – and they exploit the school's state-of-the-art facilities and resources to challenge and support students to achieve at the very highest standard.
- Students are highly motivated, hard-working, committed and aspirational. They work independently and collaboratively to produce, perform, direct, choreograph, create and critique themselves and each other. The calibre of their work is, therefore, exceptionally high.
- You and your staff ensure that there are plentiful and regular opportunities for students to participate in exhibitions, performances and community projects. The standard of this work is of a professional quality. Consequently, the vast majority of students build portfolios of work that give them a competitive edge when preparing for the next stage of their careers.
- You also prioritise students' social and mental well-being. Although the sixth form is extremely large, students work in their supportive 'strand' areas. As one student said, 'It's like going to university.' You and your team are clear about meeting the needs of individual students. For instance, the Khronos dance company enables male dancers to experiment with their skills, tricks and choreography. During large productions or exhibitions, however, students across a number of strands work collaboratively and seamlessly together. During the inspection, an impressive art exhibition involved many students, including those studying technical theatre arts, design and art.
- The leadership of teaching and learning across the school has improved since the previous inspection. You and your leaders have introduced a coaching model to

encourage all staff to reflect on their skills, share best practice and learn from each other. You are clear about where teaching is stronger, and committed to developing those who require further support. You regularly check on the quality of teaching and, throughout the inspection, your team demonstrated an accurate understanding of the rates of progress students were making over time.

- Staff are highly motivated and share your aspirations for what students can eventually achieve. Many are talented and highly praised practitioners within their own field. External scrutiny from industry professionals ensures that staff continually support students to achieve at the highest levels, particularly in vocational subjects.
- However, you acknowledge that teaching in some areas still requires further work. In many subjects, particularly the vocational areas, students receive constant feedback from their peers and staff on how they can improve, are given opportunities to practise and expectations for their performance are very high. Consequently, they make rapid and sustained progress over time. However, in some GCSE subjects, for example mathematics, this is not routinely the case. Sometimes, teachers set work that is not challenging enough and does not build on pupils' prior learning. Teachers do not give clear information on how pupils can improve their work, support them to do so or check that they have acquired the necessary skills. In these subjects, pupils do not make the same substantial progress seen elsewhere. You and your staff have deliberately promoted the importance of pupils gaining a range of GCSE and vocational qualifications. You are now focusing on ensuring that the quality of teaching in all areas is consistently high.
- Pupils arrive in Year 10 highly motivated to pursue careers in the performing arts sector. Many are very talented and creative individuals, with a wealth of skills and attributes. Pupils come from schools across London, Surrey and beyond and bring with them a range of experiences and academic ability. You and your team quickly assess their academic ability and set appropriately aspirational targets. You identify those pupils that might require further support. This might include sessions to improve their English and mathematical skills. Alternatively, it could be specific support because they have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or because they are disadvantaged. In this way, you make an accurate baseline assessment of pupils so that you can then track the progress they make. The additional educational needs department holds weekly meetings to identify any pupils who need further intervention. Mentoring, small-group work and extra sessions are all proving successful in enabling pupils to make more rapid progress.
- You are proud of the range of academic and vocational subjects you offer to suit pupils' individual needs. However, you admit that ensuring that all pupils make at least good progress across all of their subjects has proved more challenging. This has been the focus of your and your team's energy of late. You know that relying on interventions to plug gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding is financially costly and not always effective. You have reduced class sizes in some subjects, and revised the time allocation and timetable slots. Your teaching and learning team regularly checks the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils' progress in some subjects, such as English, has substantially improved and pupils

now make better progress from their starting points than pupils do nationally. However, you concede that more needs to be done to extend the best practice seen in some areas across the whole curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils and students make at least good progress from their starting points across all GCSE and A-level subjects by:
 - routinely providing pupils with advice and guidance on how they can improve their work and giving them support to do this and opportunities to prove that they have done so
 - teachers setting tasks that challenge pupils and build on prior learning
 - utilising and sharing successful teaching and learning strategies across departments
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve during lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, other senior leaders and staff. They met with the chair of the governing body and the chair of the curriculum and welfare committee. Inspectors met with the school improvement partner. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, curriculum information, referrals to external agencies and the register of safeguarding checks made on staff. Inspectors visited lessons with senior leaders to gather evidence on particular strands of teaching, learning and assessment. They watched rehearsals for the school's production, and preparations for the art exhibition opening that night. They spoke to pupils and students in the sixth form. Inspectors looked in detail at the progress of GCSE pupils, scrutinising their work and assessment records. Inspectors took account of the 271 written responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the 89 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 231 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.