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Ms Jo Tupman
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Tupman

Short inspection of Barking Abbey School, A Specialist Sports and Humanities College

Following my visit to the school on 29 March 2017 with Jill Thomas, 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 September 2012.

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 become the acting headteacher quite recently, having previously been the deputy headteacher. This has resulted in adjustments to the senior leadership team. You and your team of senior leaders have lost no time in rising to the challenge and building on the already strong position of the school. You use all the information available to gauge pupils' performance and the teaching quality, identify accurately the priorities for improvement and tackle weaknesses decisively. Consequently, the great majority of pupils continue to achieve very well.

Leaders have ensured that the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been dealt with effectively. For example, the effect of teaching on pupils' learning is assessed thoroughly so that staff and governors have accurate information about the progress all pupils make from their different starting points. In the sixth form, more Year 12 students complete their AS-level courses successfully and move into Year 13.

You and your leaders, including heads of department and heads of year, have a clear vision for the school and are aspirational for pupils and students. This results in a high proportion of students gaining places in top universities, including those in the United States. For those not seeking a university place, the proportion of pupils who move on to sustained education, employment or training after they leave Barking Abbey compares favourably with other schools. This is because leaders and

teachers provide a range of visits, careers events and activities to raise pupils' awareness of the opportunities available after leaving school.

Subject and pastoral leaders play a central part in driving the school's ambitions and aspirations forward. The great majority understand the school's priorities and gear their work to meeting these. For example, senior leaders' priority to raise the standards for the most able and disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is shared by subject leaders. Consequently, subject leaders and teachers endeavour to ensure that all pupils, regardless of their starting points, are helped to achieve their potential. Similarly, work to bring achievement in mathematics up to the same high levels found in English is proving successful. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that there remain areas to improve.

Senior leaders identify accurately those subjects that are not performing well enough and take robust action to drive improvement. Where necessary, leaders do not shy away from taking tough decisions to ensure that improvements make a sustained difference to pupils' achievements. For example, measures to improve standards in French, physical education, science and business studies are proving positive. Better-quality subject leadership, and improved teaching and assessment are raising pupils' achievements effectively. Despite improvements, you recognise that standards in some subjects, including science and design and technology, are still not strong enough.

Governors share the senior leaders' vision and ambition for school. They receive a wide range of information from leaders about the school's performance which they use well to hold teachers to account. Governors do not rely solely on being given information and visit the school regularly to gauge the pupils' academic and personal achievements. As a result, governors play an important part in supporting improvement and challenging senior leaders about pupils' performance.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and that records are detailed and of high quality. As a result, pupils are safe and well cared for. Policies and procedures are up to date and thorough training provides teachers with clear advice and guidance about what actions to take if they have a safeguarding concern. Relationships with external agencies are strong and this enables leaders to check that pupils are getting the support they need. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they know who to turn to if they have a problem. They say that bullying is rare. Pupils talk confidently about internet safety and keeping themselves safe outside school. They learn about keeping safe through assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have identified accurately that the progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and some disadvantaged pupils, has

not been as strong as that of other groups. However, leaders are tackling these differences successfully. For example, teachers use information about individual pupils' progress and aptitudes to plan work that meets their needs. The support given to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well targeted and effective. Current assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are doing well and often better than others in the school and nationally, especially in English.

- Senior leaders' careful analysis of assessment information has also shown that in some subjects, including mathematics, the most able pupils do not reach the higher grades at GCSE. Greater focus on deepening pupils' understanding is having a positive impact and the progress of the most able pupils is improving. Senior leaders recognise that this remains a priority.
- Leaders have also pinpointed that White British boys do less well than other groups. Again, efforts to raise the achievements of this group are making a difference. Leaders recognise that there is still more to do. However, current assessment information indicates that there is a noticeable reduction in the variations between different groups of pupils.
- Leaders and governors were quick to spot that achievement in the sixth form dropped in 2016, with some A-level results lower than expected. Swift action has resulted in changes to several of the courses being offered so that they better meet the needs of all students. Much of this is proving successful and many students do very well. However, not all the new courses challenge and stretch the most able students as much as they should. Despite this, the sixth form is a strength of the school. The proportion of students who go to top British universities and those in the United States is impressive. So, too, is the impact of the sports academy where striking achievements in sport build students' confidence to excel in their academic work.
- The school has robust procedures for promoting high levels of attendance and discouraging unnecessary absence. While the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains lower than national figures, it is rising steadily. The school has convincing evidence that the higher-than-average levels of absence are the result of pupils' health needs.
- A clear theme running through the school is the positive behaviour of pupils and their excellent attitudes to their work. Pupils are keen to do well and seize the opportunities given by teachers to work hard. They conduct themselves well around the school and are polite and respectful towards others. These attitudes have a strong impact on pupils' achievements because they enable learning to take place without undue interruption.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders continue to drive the improvements identified in their plans, especially the achievements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

- the most able pupils and students are given work that challenges and stretches them so that their achievements are improved further
- the curriculum is matched to the needs and interests of all pupils and students, including White British boys.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors carried out the following activities:

- met with the acting headteacher, and senior and middle leaders
- held a meeting with three members of the governing body
- met with three groups of pupils and students to seek their views of the school
- listened to a group of pupils in Year 7 reading
- reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; information about pupils' progress, the governing body and pupils' attendance; the school's single central record; pre-employment checks and safeguarding procedures
- scrutinised the school's website and confirmed that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information
- considered 51 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 70 responses to a survey of staff views and comments made by 44 parents
- visited a range of lessons with senior leaders.