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Mrs Carrie Lynch  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Lynch

### **Short inspection of Great Baddow High School**

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017 with Simon Bell, 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 May 2013.

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

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

You have restructured the senior leadership team by creating more roles of responsibility which clearly play to individual strengths. You have a committed group of leaders who work cohesively as a strong team and who work relentlessly with you to achieve your shared vision for the school. Staff morale is high and teachers and support staff feel valued by you for the work that they do. Parents also speak highly about the school. One parent wrote in response to Ofsted's online survey: 'Choosing a school for your child is not always the easiest thing to do. However, both my husband and I are delighted that we have certainly chosen the right school for our child. Our child is very happy and is doing well. We would highly recommend Great Baddow High School.'

Subject leaders also play a key role in school improvement, and my discussion with this group shows that they are well supported in raising standards across the school. You hold them to account well for the performance of their subject areas and are able to monitor their impact through their subject self-evaluation documents. This group of leaders feels valued by both senior leaders and members of the governing body.

Expectations of pupils are high and their achievements are celebrated whenever possible. Walls in corridors are adorned with displays of pupils' work and these are respected by pupils. The quality of pupils' artwork is extremely high, so much so that members of the public have sought to purchase pupils' paintings in the past. The school's good reputation for sport is clearly evident through the quality of the facilities and pupil's achievements. Pupils with whom I spoke were full of praise for this aspect of your provision, and many told me that physical education (PE) was their favourite subject in the school.

Teaching in the school is good, and there is also some outstanding practice. You make effective use of the very best practitioners to work with other teachers, who have identified aspects of their teaching which they want to improve. Your teachers gain the respect of the pupils they teach and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive. Your resourced provision for pupils with a hearing impairment is of high quality and these pupils are fully included in the main school provision and achieve well.

There is a 'buzz' of purposeful learning at Great Baddow High School. This was evident from the inspectors' visits to lessons, where pupils were keen to talk to me and my colleague with great enthusiasm about what they were learning. Teachers have a very good understanding of the needs of different groups of pupils, and I saw some of the most able pupils being challenged by work of a suitable level of difficulty.

Pupils' progress over time continues to be good across a wide range of subjects. This is due to you having sustained the good quality of teaching and also to your sharper analysis of how well different groups of pupils achieve. You never 'take your eye off the ball', and regularly discuss the performance of individual pupils in your weekly meetings with subject leaders. These meetings, along with your systems for tracking pupils' progress, demonstrate that further work is required to diminish the difference between disadvantaged pupils' progress and others nationally. Your forecast for the current Year 11 cohort also shows that although pupils in English make consistently good progress, some of the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, could make even better progress in mathematics. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well over time.

Pupils are considerate towards one another in lessons and their attitudes towards learning are typically positive. They routinely support one another. In fact, pupils told me that if a teacher or a teaching assistant is not available at the time they need help, 'another pupil will always be there to help'. Parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire were particularly positive about the way the school cares for its pupils and allows them to flourish. Pupils' good behaviour reflects the values you aim to promote. Pupils' overall attendance over time is above average, but you are aware further work is needed to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils told the inspection team that they feel safe in school. In their discussions, they demonstrated a strong awareness of different types of bullying, as well as an in-depth understanding of the risks associated with the use of the internet and

social networking sites. They said that the teachers are there to look after their needs and they feel they do a good job in keeping them safe. Pupils have a good understanding of the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act (2010). One pupil told me, 'It's alright to be different in this school.'

Pupils at the school receive high-quality careers guidance and support. Those who choose to stay on at the school as sixth-form students feel they received a good induction when they were in Year 11. Your sixth-form students are happy individuals who express great pride in what the school has done for them. Discussions with students in the sixth form indicated that they select appropriate programmes of study, and are well supported in preparing for the next stage of their educational career. Many apply to, and are successful in gaining places at, some of the more prestigious universities.

The governing body continues to offer an appropriate degree of challenge and support. My discussion with them demonstrated a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Between them, the governing body has a very useful range of skills, of which they make effective use. They are fully up to date with the latest safeguarding matters and ensure that a suitable safeguarding policy is published on the school's website.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding children is at the heart of what the school stands for. All staff have received and read the latest guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016), and demonstrated a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. All staff have also undergone training in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff, including those who join the school mid-year, receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. The school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff is compliant.

Pupils feel safe and receive guidance about issues related to safeguarding through regular visitors to the school and also in lessons. The inspectors' review of a case study relating to a particularly vulnerable child shows that the school's leaders go above and beyond what is expected of them to ensure each child's safety.

A relatively large team of staff have key responsibilities for safeguarding but each knows their precise role and there is no confusion. Pupils who attend alternative provision are monitored rigorously and systems are in place to ensure their safety.

### **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school still remained good, one of my lines of enquiry was to look at how well the school's leaders had addressed the relevant areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The extent to which leaders have tackled these areas provides evidence of the quality of leadership over time.
- You have made a determined effort to share the good teaching practice that exists within the school. You encourage staff to observe each other's lessons

either on a formal or an informal basis. Middle leaders told me that it is quite usual to drop into a colleague's lesson to look at effective strategies. You have rightly identified some of the best practitioners as 'teaching champions' who model effective practice to colleagues who strive to improve.

- You have also successfully developed teachers' use of questioning so that pupils are encouraged to consider a topic in more depth and provide detailed explanations for their answers. As a result of these actions, pupils gain a more thorough grasp of what they are being taught.
- You have raised teachers' awareness of different groups of pupils, including the most able. Seating plans are used by teachers more effectively to strategically place pupils of a similar ability together or to target more challenging questions to the most able pupils. As a result of this, most-able pupils' needs are being met better than at the time of the previous inspection, although you have continued to identify this group as an ongoing priority.
- My second line of enquiry looked at how well disadvantaged pupils achieve and whether the additional funding provided for these pupils was making a difference.
- You have made this group a key focus for your weekly progress meetings. You have also analysed carefully the impact of the strategies you have deployed using the additional funding. You have raised the profile of this group among the staff by creating a role for a senior leader who has oversight of this group.
- Our review of your data, scrutiny of these pupils' work and discussions with them indicates that the differences between their progress and that of others continues to diminish, but that further work is still required. In many subjects, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than others nationally. However, your data for pupils' progress in mathematics shows that some disadvantaged pupils could do better. Inspectors also found when looking at pupils' books that some disadvantaged pupils do not routinely respond to their teachers' feedback as is required in your marking policy.
- I saw some of your older pupils, including sports leaders, working productively with pupils in the library, helping them with their reading. These older pupils spoke with great pride about the impact they are having. One boy proudly informed me that a Year 7 pupil he is helping now has a reading age of 11, when in September his reading age was nine.
- My third line of enquiry related to the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Published information for 2016 raised concerns about these groups' attendance.
- You showed the inspectors a number of case studies relating to pupils with very specific personal issues. Although it is clear that you did your utmost to support these pupils to attend, there were many contributory factors which were beyond the school's control.
- As a result of these pupils' lower attendance you have allocated additional hours to support staff to target calls home on the first day of a pupil's absence and

have given the attendance officer targeted case work.

- You have also formed links with West Ham United football club who provide weekly mentoring which is linked to a rewards system.
- While the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen rapidly compared to the same time last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below that of others in the school. The strategies you have implemented are appropriate, but have yet to demonstrate impact.
- My next line of enquiry related to pupils' apparent underachievement in humanities subjects in 2016. Closer inspection of school achievement data shows that this was in geography.
- You have appointed a new leader of geography. Discussions with pupils show that they enjoy this subject and feel they are making progress. Your current data of pupils' progress in this subject and the scrutiny of pupils' work carried out during the inspection indicate that progress has now picked up. The leader of geography has produced an accurate self-evaluation summary of the effectiveness of her department and this is linked to a good quality improvement plan.
- My final line of enquiry involved looking at why some subjects underperformed in the sixth form in 2016; namely history, theatre studies and product design.
- You had already analysed your A-level results in great detail and could produce reasons as to why students underachieved in these subjects. Importantly, you have taken decisive action to address the weaknesses you have identified. For example, you identified that the coursework element in history was a weakness and have taken action to develop students' skills in producing coursework that is of a better quality. You have provided additional support for the teaching of theatre studies, particularly in the writing paper. You know that in product design, it was the thematic enquiry component that caused students to underachieve. You have worked hard on improving this element and have also encouraged staff in this subject to become subject examiners. This has enabled them to gain a better understanding of how students' work is assessed.
- Your current data and scrutiny of students' work indicate that outcomes are set to improve in 2017. You wisely include sixth-form students in your weekly discussions about individual student's progress and you track their progress as rigorously as you do for other pupils in the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of the most able pupils and pupils who are disadvantaged achieve as well as they should, particularly but not exclusively, in mathematics
- disadvantaged pupils respond more regularly to their teachers' written feedback
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and other senior leaders, as well as a group of subject leaders, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. My colleague met with your special educational needs coordinator to discuss how well pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve in the school. I met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. Together with my colleague, we scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement, and assessment information for all year groups. My colleague held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. We both undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. I took account of the views of 49 staff who responded to the online survey. I also considered the 129 Parent View responses.