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Ms Claire Edis  
Headteacher  
Ark Bolingbroke Academy  
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London  
SW11 6BF

Dear Ms Edis

### **Short inspection of Ark Bolingbroke Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018 with Laurence King, 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 December 2013.

#### **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 leaders and governors have overseen the development of the school so that it now includes pupils in Years 8 to 12. You have built upon the strengths identified in the previous inspection. Since then, you and your team have focused on securing at least consistently good teaching across all subjects and you have sought to ensure that all teachers are making good use of information on students' prior learning when planning lessons. You have identified key priorities for this year, such as aiming to establish exceptional post-16 provision and amending the curriculum, assessment structure and intervention programmes.

You and your team are unswervingly ambitious, promoting the highest expectations for the whole school community. The school has an impressive focus on the continuing professional development of staff, and this is resulting in teachers' enhanced skills in the classroom. Training is part of school routines, with sessions taking place every Friday morning. Your teaching staff really value this, and the impact of the training is shown in those lessons where learning is clearly planned to target pupils' needs and to challenge their different abilities. Your 'Teach like a Champion' sessions for middle leaders are helping to develop consistency in teaching and learning across the subjects of the curriculum. You are also using the Ark network to train new teachers.

The governors and trustees, including Ark's regional director, have clear insights into all aspects of the life of the school. The enthusiastic commitment of the founding parent governors helps ensure the success of your vision for the school.

Parents and carers say that your communication with them is open and informative and that you really do put your slogan, 'Be Bold', into practice.

You and your team are providing a broad and balanced curriculum complemented by an extensive range of inclusive enrichment activities, particularly in the performing arts. This underpins your pupils' confidence and commitment to learning. Your pupils are full of praise for the care and support the school provides.

While students' outcomes are good overall, you are aware of some inconsistencies between subjects and groups of pupils, and your actions to tackle these were a focus for the inspection.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors have developed strong systems to support pupils' welfare and minimise risks to their safety. You have set up an effective safeguarding team of staff, and the pupils know how to contact them, including by email, if they have any concerns. Pupils say that they are listened to and feel safe.

Your protection of vulnerable pupils is also noteworthy and all staff are alert to the needs of students who may be at risk, including from child sexual exploitation or domestic violence. Your actions have ensured not only that vulnerable pupils achieve high levels of attendance, but also that they succeed academically and socially.

Sixth formers are proud of the way they have delivered assemblies to promote the 'Prevent' duty. Your records of behaviour incidents and how they are handled show that you and your pupils work together to prevent direct or indirect discriminatory behaviour.

### **Inspection findings**

- At our initial meeting, we discussed and identified key lines of enquiry for the inspection.
- The first line of enquiry was chosen because of the continuing variations in pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations. An action point from the previous inspection report was that the school should eradicate inconsistencies between subjects, but some remain. We agreed to focus on the school's actions to address this and evidence of the impact of these actions on teaching and learning.
- You have been developing the roles of middle leaders, including some who are new to their posts, with clear priorities for improvement. The recent appointment of new subject leaders has clearly begun to make a difference. They have been given clear targets and are being supported within the school and by cooperation with other ARK academies. For example, there has been standardisation of assessments, which give insights into the examiners' expectations of high-level responses. Your work with staff to raise the quality and use of ongoing assessment has been particularly important for the

departments which underperformed. Middle leaders and teachers are now more effective at using information for curricular planning and to track and demonstrate pupils' progress over time.

- The school has worked to ensure that the depth of teachers' subject knowledge remains strong, including that of staff new to the school. Subject specialists routinely observe their colleagues. The targets they set are particularly helpful because they are subject-specific. The work of subject leaders in planning lessons alongside teachers both serves a practical purpose and contributes to teachers' professional development. Visits to lessons in food and physical education provided evidence that teachers' subject knowledge is being used well and that pupils' progress and attainment are improving. Current key stage 4 assessment information also shows better progress and outcomes than in 2017 in humanities subjects, particularly geography.
- The second agreed line of enquiry was informed by the previous inspection report's emphasis on the need to ensure that teachers take account of students' prior learning when planning lessons. Noting the comparatively low progress of middle-ability students in 2017, we explored to what extent their learning is improving.
- Visits to lessons showed that teachers routinely plan carefully, with a focus on pupils' prior learning and different starting points. In the best lessons, particularly in English, French and German, we saw that teachers knew pupils well and targeted their questions according to their abilities. The seating plans available in most lessons showed categories of prior attainment. The assessment information available in many pupils' books indicated that middle prior attainers were usually meeting and often exceeding their targets. Assessment information for Years 9, 10 and 11 also indicates that middle-ability pupils are making better progress and some of them are now exceeding expectations.
- The third line of enquiry focused on the sixth form, which is in its first year. We investigated the quality of teaching and learning and the progress made by current students.
- Vocational learning is given high status by the school, which values preparation for the world of work and higher education equally. Expectations are high. A range of strategies develop students' independence. These include the innovative 'academic tutoring' programme and your insistence that all Year 12 students undertake the Extended Project Qualification.
- There was some variability in the degree of challenge presented to students in lessons. Some teaching was characterised by questions that invited students to apply and synthesise knowledge and to justify their answers. For example, Year 12 students articulated a high level of conceptual thinking when discussing arguments for the existence of God. However, in some lessons, closed questioning did not encourage deeper thinking.
- Inspection evidence, including the school's assessment information, shows that students' overall progress in the sixth form is strong. This is reflected in their written work, the way in which they use opportunities to respond to learning advice from teachers and the pride they take in their beautifully presented and

well-organised folders. The students are full of confidence about their learning. This is boosted by the unrelenting support teachers provide and the helpful information they share with students and their parents following regular assessments.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop teachers' questioning skills across all subjects to ensure that pupils and students can apply their learning and deepen their knowledge and thinking
- continue to ensure that students from all starting points in all subjects – particularly middle-ability students and especially in the humanities, food and physical education – make sustained and substantial progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Hudson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The following activities took place during the inspection:

- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, the regional director of the Ark schools network and a group of five parents.
- Inspectors visited 19 lessons. Teaching and learning were observed jointly with you and members of your leadership team.
- Discussions were held with pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and students from Year 12.
- The inspection team scrutinised a range of school documents, including policies, safeguarding records, case studies, governors' minutes and the school website.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of pupils' books, students' ring binders and other work.
- The 117 responses to the Ofsted online survey Parent View were considered. Inspectors also analysed surveys completed by 60 staff and 179 pupils.