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Ms Julia Mortimore
Headteacher
St Bartholomew's School
Andover Road
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Dear Ms Mortimore

Short inspection of St Bartholomew's School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018 with Nicholas Simmonds and Peter Rodin, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You provide strong and determined leadership aimed at providing high-quality education for all pupils regardless of their ability or circumstance. You are tenacious in pursuit of excellence, while balancing your drive with the well-being of staff. You are well supported by your highly effective leadership team. Morale is high at your inclusive school and everyone at the school works very hard to provide the best for every pupil. Within the ambitious and caring ethos of the school, pupils make excellent progress and achieve very well. However, you and your staff are not complacent and constantly seek ways to help pupils to make even greater progress.

Pupils behave very well at the school. They are proud of their school. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and take good care of their environment. They are considerate and respectful towards each other and their teachers. In lessons, we saw pupils working hard and they kept going when work was difficult. Pupils' work is well presented and is of a consistently high standard. The staff at the school provide an exceptional range of well-attended clubs and activities during activity time and after school. These extra activities, which support academic and personal

development, are valued by pupils and their parents. A group of pupils said, 'The range of activities is fantastic: there is something for everyone.' Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy school, and this is reflected in their good attendance.

Leaders track pupils' progress meticulously and regularly, which allows teachers to provide prompt and effective help for any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. When pupils' progress causes concern, they are given relevant extra support to help them catch up. For example, the 'back on track' programme in Year 10 and 11 helps pupils who need extra help to fulfil their potential. As a result of this focused support, pupils' progress is very strong in key stage 3 and key stage 4, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. A group of pupils said, 'The teachers here are incredibly helpful, they tell you how to improve.'

Leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely and check how well it contributes to strong progress. Leaders, therefore, know that in Years 7 to 11 pupils' progress is very strong in English, mathematics, science, the humanities subjects, creative and practical subjects. You also know the very few subjects, for example modern foreign languages, where progress is not quite as good as in the best subjects.

At the last inspection senior leaders were asked to ensure that disadvantaged pupils made faster progress and that work given to pupils was better matched to their abilities. Leaders have developed very effective approaches for training which develops teachers' skills well. This helps teachers to plan effectively for different groups of pupils' varying abilities and needs. As a result, pupils in Years 7 to 11, including disadvantaged pupils, now make very strong progress in nearly all subjects.

The sixth form provides an inclusive and stimulating environment where students feel safe and enjoy learning. The curriculum offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses which successfully prepare students for higher education, apprenticeships and employment. Teachers have been effectively supported in preparing students for the new A-Level courses. As a result, students are given prompt and incisive guidance on how to improve. Leaders' current assessments indicate that students are making the same strong progress as in previous years.

Governors provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders. They visit the school regularly, attend school leadership meetings and analyse pupils' achievement thoroughly. As a result, they have a very good understanding of the school's many strengths and areas where further improvement is possible. For example, they recognise that students in the sixth form could make even better progress. Governors monitor carefully the impact of plans to improve pupils' progress in modern foreign languages. They take a professional and reflective approach to their roles. For example, they regularly attend relevant and up-to-date training. Governors understand well the current financial challenges and they are working effectively with you to ensure that the school continues to thrive.

Parents and pupils speak highly of the school and nearly all parents who responded

to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. Many parents commented that the school was exceptionally caring, praised the teachers and recognised that their children made rapid progress at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. Governors and the leadership team ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All records are detailed and of a high quality. All staff and governors are trained on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. Before appointing staff, leaders carry out all required employment checks. These are then recorded meticulously on the single central register.

A dedicated team of staff work with determination and sensitivity alongside pupils, parents and external agencies to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. There is a strong culture of vigilance and support for pupils' health, welfare and well-being. Parents say their children feel safe and are well cared for in school.

Pupils state that staff are approachable and that they know an adult they can turn to if they have concerns. Pupils told us they value the regular reminders through lessons and assemblies about how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I and my colleagues focused on the following lines of enquiry: the extent to which progress of lower-attaining pupils is improving; how effectively leaders and managers are increasing pupils' progress where it could be even stronger; and how successfully leaders are improving students' progress in the sixth form.
- Leaders have developed effective ways of helping lower-attaining pupils make more rapid progress. They are supported well at key stage 3 to improve their English and mathematics. In key stage 4, lower-attaining pupils follow a bespoke curriculum which allows them to focus on fewer GCSEs and receive extra help in English and mathematics. Leaders' current assessments and work that inspectors saw in books show that these pupils now make rapid progress. Lower-attaining pupils are well prepared for their next steps through additional careers and life skills lessons. As a result, in 2017 all lower-attaining pupils successfully transferred into further education and training.
- Across key stage 3 and key stage 4, progress is very strong and improving in most subjects. Leaders are working to improve progress in modern foreign languages, which is not as strong as in other subjects. Most pupils now concentrate on one language in Year 9 and, as a result, they are better prepared for their GCSE courses. Teachers have also improved how they prepare pupils for the written aspect of modern foreign language GCSE examinations. Teachers' assessments show pupils are now achieving better at this aspect of the course.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the many strengths of the sixth form and how

it could improve. For example, leaders are rightly increasing students' participation in work experience. Currently, students make strong progress in the sixth form. Leaders are now, correctly, focusing on supporting teachers to improve students' progress even further so that it matches the impressive progress made by pupils in the main school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the rates of progress for students in the sixth form continue to accelerate
- current actions to accelerate progress in modern foreign languages are effective.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, leaders, governors and staff and spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally. We visited lessons to observe learning, accompanied by senior leaders, and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I and my colleagues observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they left school. We considered documents about safeguarding, attendance, current pupils' progress and governors' work. The outcomes of a pupil questionnaire, staff survey and 329 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were taken into account.