

# Barking Abbey School, A Specialist Sports and Humanities College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	101241
<b>Local Authority</b>	Barking and Dagenham
<b>Inspection number</b>	307622
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 September 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Adrian Lyons HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	2004
Sixth form	624
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Councillor Fred Barns
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Mark Lloyd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Sandringham Road Barking IG11 9AG
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8270 4100
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8270 4090

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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Barking Abbey School is a heavily over subscribed specialist sports and humanities college. It has recently been designated an enhanced specialist school for targeted work with gifted and talented students. It is a very large school and has an exceptionally large sixth form. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above average. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic background is well above average with large proportions from Indian, Pakistani or Black African heritage. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is above average, but few are at an early stage of learning English. The school has acquired a vast array of awards including Sportsmark Gold, Investors in People and the Basic Skills Agency Charter Mark.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Barking Abbey is an outstanding school. This statement will come as no surprise to the very large majority of parents returning questionnaires who had nothing but praise for the school. Typical of parental comments were, 'Barking Abbey is an excellent school' or 'I am very pleased with the way the school gives help and support to the children, not only in school matters but outside school...'

Standards in Year 11 are exceptionally and consistently high, resulting from outstanding progress given their starting points. Results are continually improving, thus enhancing the life chances of students. Many stay on to the very large sixth form from where they progress to a wide variety of higher education institutions and employment. The proportion of students leaving school and not moving to further education, training or employment is one of the lowest in the borough. The life chances of students are enhanced in a variety of ways beyond academic results. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding as is their care, guidance and support.

The school is an oasis of calm and harmony where students feel very safe. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and through excellent work with the local authority, the rate of teenage pregnancies has significantly reduced. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. The needs of the local and wider community are promoted and embedded in all aspects of school life and this is reflected in the diverse range of partnerships with local and international partners. Diversity is promoted in school assemblies and through a range of cultural events where the school ensures that inequality is challenged and addressed by all students and adults. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion.

Students clearly enjoy being at school as evidenced both by what they told inspectors and the above average attendance figures. Behaviour is excellent around the school not least because of the excellent relationships between students and staff. The school now offers a broad range of subjects that meet the needs and interests of different students. The curriculum is good and continuing to improve. The school has been innovative in its use of learning time. Academic and personal mentoring has a high profile. However, within the context of this outstanding school a relative weakness is that there are insufficient planned opportunities for students to reflect. The legal statutory entitlement for all students of religious education for all students is now in place but is a very recent development.

Two key reasons for the outstanding achievement of students are that the quality of teaching and learning and also leadership and management are outstanding. Inspectors visited lessons and spoke to staff and students. They found that the key to the excellent teaching was a combination of positive relationships and a strong focus on continuing professional development for teachers. Leaders and managers at all levels place a strong emphasis on improving teaching. Central to the rapid improvements in the school is the commitment and quiet determination of the headteacher. He empowers senior and middle leaders to innovate and improve provision.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 1

This very large sixth form offers an outstanding quality of education. Standards continue to rise. One of the strengths apparent in the sixth form is the school's performance management.

Whilst results in 2007 were very good, weaknesses in some subjects were identified. By summer 2008, results in these subjects had risen dramatically due to the school's intense focus on improvement. In the sixth form students feel extremely well cared for, guided and supported. There are strong processes for ensuring students are matched to appropriate courses and helped to prepare for higher education or employment. Students are extremely positive about the quality of teaching, citing a combination of teacher dedication and variety of teaching and learning approaches as the key ingredients of its excellence.

The sixth form provides strong monitoring of academic progress and provides a complimentary tutorial programme. There are excellent opportunities for elite athletes through the sports academies and students are attracted from around England and as far as Lithuania. The sixth form council plays an important role in the running of the school. For example, through their initiative, sporting opportunities have been increased for non-sports specialists. Inspectors spoke to mature and confident young people who were extremely pleased with what the sixth form had to offer. They observed great talent in music and art. However, provision for enrichment and the encouragement of students' personal development and well-being, is less well established than is often found in the best sixth forms. The sixth form is rightly held in high regard in the community.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

There are no major issues for the school to address, but to improve further, the school should build on its new arrangements for religious education for students in Years 9 to 14 and consider ways to create more opportunities for students to reflect.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

On entry to the school pupils have average standards. By Year 11 their progress has been outstanding and they achieve standards which are well above average. In the most recent results more than three quarters of pupils gained five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C and over two thirds attained five top grade passes including English and mathematics.

Key Stage 3 is taught over two years rather than three. As a result, pupils are less likely to achieve the higher levels. However, their standards in Year 8 are on a par with those nationally at the end of Year 9. The advantage of this new curriculum is that pupils spend three years studying GCSE subjects. Early indications, from the school's detailed tracking system, is for results to improve further next year.

In the sixth form, value added analysis provides evidence that in 2007 standards were average and given their starting points, progress was good. In 2008 both standards and achievement improved markedly. In 2007, student progress in vocational courses was not as good as in traditional A levels. They have now overtaken points scores in traditional subjects and results are outstanding.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' moral, cultural and social education is outstanding. Students of all abilities and backgrounds interact well and show maturity and consideration for others in lessons and when moving about the school. This creates a very positive ethos. Students enjoy their education and take advantage of the many extra-curricular activities on offer. Punctuality to lessons is

excellent and indicates a keenness and desire to engage in learning. Plans are in place to enhance opportunities for reflection and engagement in activities that inspire awe and wonder but this is yet to impact sufficiently on spiritual development.

Students behave safely in lessons and are very aware of potential hazards that could occur in physical education (PE), science and technology. Students' support for the move to eating and drinking healthy foods is seen in the popularity of school lunches. Students respond well to lessons on health-related issues. Participation rates in PE are very high and the sports specialism and sports academy have had a very positive effect on levels of fitness and reducing obesity. During the inspection, the school's impact on fitness and obesity was the subject of a study visit by professionals from the Netherlands.

The school council is highly regarded by the students as a way of influencing change in the school. All students are also regularly consulted and their voice has brought about a number of changes to courses and the way subjects are taught. Citizenship is an increasing strength in the school and students are very well involved in the local and wider community. Students make good progress in preparing for their future economic well-being. Their literacy, numeracy and computer skills are well developed. However, the school recognises the need to further develop enterprise skills. The curriculum for personal, health, social and economic education has been enhanced this year in the lower school by the inclusion of economic education and financial capability in the planning of lessons. The enrichment programme in the sixth form has many strengths. For example, students undertake community service and support younger students in the main school. Students are prepared for life in modern Britain through the citizenship programme but currently its impact is limited because the excellent mentoring and careers programme eats in to this provision.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The school places teaching and learning at the heart of its work and students make excellent progress as a result. Students say they are 'here to learn' and they are proud about that; they work extremely well together and have very good relationships with their teachers. There is therefore a genuine learning culture within the school and teachers are keen to work together to share ideas and seek out new approaches. They are extremely well supported by a talented team of expert teachers who provide specialist individualised training.

The very large majority of lessons are good. Few lessons are less than good while many are outstanding. Most are well-paced and engaging. They include a good range of lively, purposeful activities which help students apply what they learn. Teachers expect the very best of students and they respond with enthusiasm. In a drama lesson, the teacher challenged the students to seek creative solutions and provided structured stepping stones to help them do this. Skilful questioning and expert subject knowledge make lessons come alive.

Most of the time, students are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Marking is usually helpful, though its quality varies between subjects. In many lessons, students are encouraged to talk about their work and reflect on how well they have done. For example, in an A level dance lesson, students evaluated each others' performances with honesty and sensitivity.

Teachers and special support assistants also work very well together. They make good use of information about students' progress to plan lessons and adapt their teaching to the needs of the students. Exceptional teaching and support are provided for those with particular learning difficulties with the result they are thriving within the school community. Teachers are confident to take learning outside the classroom, making excellent use, for example, of the garden on the lower school site.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good curriculum. The extra-curricular and enrichment provision is outstanding and ranges from physical education to the arts. The school constantly evaluates and monitors the effectiveness of its curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all students. An innovative curriculum has been introduced that is flexible and offers students many different pathways. All Year 9 students begin their study for formal qualifications early because they are entered for the national tests at the end of Year 8. This allows them to pursue courses which lead to traditional GCSEs or to choose a mixture of GCSE and vocational courses from the beginning of Year 9. There are also opportunities for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11 to attend courses at local colleges to develop skills in various work-related courses.

There are excellent opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures through their subject lessons as well as whole-school 'Cultural Days' and different cultural events. The school's specialisms of Sport and Humanities are having a positive impact on raising attainment by improving students' engagement, self-confidence and ability to work collaboratively in a harmonious international community. Students are encouraged to develop their independent skills by taking responsibility for their own learning and they have very good opportunities to develop their capacity for leadership and teamwork through sports and other activities.

Community provision includes strong links with local primary schools and members of the local and wider community actively use the sports facilities. Very good use is made of computers in all subjects across the curriculum, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The sixth form offers a vast array of subjects and its increasing popularity has increased the numbers in classes, improving the opportunities to varied teaching and learning approaches.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Students are very well supported on transfer from primary school and in their choice of different pathways leading to exams for 14-19 year olds. Excellent induction and reception arrangements mean that new arrivals feel very safe and well cared for on both school sites. Staff know their students really well. The mentoring system is central to students' excellent progress and is appreciated particularly by older students. Mentors and other staff use the school management information system to track the progress of students and this helps inform their guidance and support. A parent of a Year 11 student told inspectors that 'the website reports keep parents informed of test results and commendation.' Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

The school has successfully deployed support staff to maintain above average attendance. Unauthorised absence is falling. The school very successfully promotes equality by meeting the needs of all learners. The school site is well maintained and health and safety audits and risk assessments are carried out regularly.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

The headteacher, senior and middle leaders have developed a learning environment in which all pupils are able to flourish. There are clear plans identifying key priorities which relate to students' development and achievement to which all staff contribute. The school has effectively transformed its leadership. Central to school improvement and its excellent capacity to improve further has been a shift in the distribution of much of the responsibility for learning development to middle leaders. They take ownership of the school's teaching and learning agenda. The school leadership team encourages teachers to take risks with their teaching and this has improved the learning experiences for students, and the quality assurance systems ensure learning is at the heart of all development.

All leaders have undertaken rigorous training in lesson observation which ensures consistency in evaluating learning quality. Middle leaders regularly evaluate the quality of lessons and update their plans to improve students' progress and leaders at all levels contribute to the school's self-evaluation and effective action is taken to meet identified priorities. Leaders at all levels contribute to providing opportunities for the development of staff skills. A key element is the highly effective 'pedagogy team' which provides professional support to coach and mentor staff to improve teaching quality.

The governing body is appropriately organised into committees to oversee the work of the school. School results are analysed carefully and used to set challenging targets for students. This information is widely used by teachers to plan learning and set appropriate challenges for learners. The school has been awarded a financial standard quality mark and this together with the annual audit ensures financial resources are used efficiently and effectively. The school deploys its staff to ensure learning is effective and learning resources are used very well to enhance the learning experience.

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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

<sup>1</sup>Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

07 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Barking Abbey School, A Specialist Sports and Humanities College, Barking, IG11 9AG

Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to us about your work, your life in school and all you do. I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school.

We believe your school is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher and the people with responsibilities make decisions with your best interests in mind.
- You enjoy coming to school and you achieve extremely well.
- The quality of teaching in your school is excellent and you are very well prepared for examinations.
- We know that you are cared for extremely well. The mentoring sessions seem particularly successful in helping you to make really good progress and choose the right courses.
- You behave in a very sensible and mature way around the school and in lessons.
- The vast majority of you and your parents are very happy with the school and all it offers. Many of you take part in the wide range of extra activities.
- Becoming a sports and humanities college has improved your resources and led to many opportunities for you to excel particularly in sport. However, we were also impressed with the skill we witnessed from students in areas such as art and music.
- The school council together with the head boy and girl, play an important role in securing improvements in the school.
- Students from different backgrounds get on really well together. An excellent contribution is made to improving relations between different communities in school and in the local area.

Your school is outstanding, but no school is perfect. We have asked the leadership team to provide more opportunities for you to pause and reflect.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons

Her Majesty's Inspector