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Dear Mr Banks

Short inspection of The Boswells School

Following my visit to the school on 22 February 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Katrina Lambert, 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 April 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 and your leadership team have a clear vision for the school and it is quite clear from the responses to Ofsted's surveys from both staff and parents that they completely support this vision. One parent wrote: 'The Boswells School is a happy vibrant place of learning and nurturing. It is a safe environment where students are treated as individuals, and are encouraged to develop, grow and learn so that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.' This view of the school is typical of many of those who responded.

You know your school well. Your self-evaluation summary document is both evaluative and accurate. This is because you have rigorous systems in place to monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school. For example, you schedule weekly meetings with subject leaders to discuss pupils' progress, you meet with all heads of faculty at the start of the autumn term to discuss examination results and every faculty undergoes a thorough review of its effectiveness during the academic year. You use all of this information well to inform your school improvement planning, which is communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

You know that you could not have sustained the good standards achieved at the time of the last inspection without the support of your middle leaders. Consequently, you have invested in this group of staff and taken every measure to

ensure that they perform to a high standard. They know what they do well and are eager to learn from one another. They told me that they can approach their line manager at any time and know that they will be listened to. You encourage a frank and open dialogue between middle and senior leaders, in order to quickly identify any key issues which might affect the school's performance.

You rightly addressed weaknesses in teaching as a key priority after the last inspection. During this inspection, the inspection team observed many examples of highly effective teaching, across a wide range of subject areas, during visits to lessons. Pupils told us that they really appreciate the enthusiasm teachers demonstrate for their subjects. They told us this enthusiasm motivates them to want to do their very best.

Your school is truly inclusive. Every pupil is valued and encouraged to fulfil their potential. Pupils are proud of their school, appreciate the efforts made by their teachers and work hard in lessons. They move around the school purposefully, wear their uniform with pride and arrive at their lessons on time and well equipped to get on with their learning.

You have adapted your curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils. They now have a choice of three pathways and make their choices following sound advice from their teachers and with the full involvement of their parents. You ensure that parents are in a good position to support their children because you arrange specially themed sessions relevant to the needs of the particular year group. Pupils also appreciate the great range of extra-curricular activities and clubs on offer and the uptake is large.

You have developed pupils' leadership well by providing them with a wide range of roles and responsibilities which enable them to make a valuable contribution to the school community. Pupils willingly take on the role of prefects and school council representatives and are able to speak about the impact of their valuable work. Sixth-form students make productive use of their time by supporting younger pupils with their learning and progress.

Pupils typically behave well when in school and have positive attitudes towards their learning. You have no need for any kind of internal exclusion facility. Your monitoring of pupils' behaviour shows that, where there is any tendency for specific pupils to demonstrate any poor behaviour on a repeated basis, these pupils tend to be in Year 10. Hence, you are monitoring these pupils' behaviour more closely in order to identify the causes and to put appropriate strategies in place.

Pupils' overall outcomes continue to improve as the quality of teaching in the school has become more effective over time. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve particularly well because of the well-targeted support they receive. Outcomes for sixth-form students have improved significantly over time and are impressive. You are aware that some challenges remain. For example, your robust systems for tracking progress show that a continued focus is required to bring the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils closer to those of others in

the school. Equally, you know that the school also needs to ensure that pupils with middle prior attainment make similar progress to their lower- and higher-attaining peers. Outcomes in science, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, could be better than they are at present. A key factor in improved outcomes is your 'MAD' (making a difference) system, in which teachers feed back to pupils after their assessments using a special sheet and require pupils to respond in such a way to demonstrate that they have learned from their mistakes and can improve their performance. Where this system works well, for example in English, it demonstrates clear impact. However, it is not yet consistently well implemented across all subjects.

The governing body has also contributed well towards maintaining the good standards in the school. Governors regularly challenge the school's leaders through their regular meetings and visits to the school. Between them, they have a useful set of skills in order to accurately evaluate the work of leaders and the impact they are having. My scrutiny of the minutes of their meetings demonstrates that they are making effective use of their skills and knowledge to ask pertinent questions relating to the areas senior leaders have identified as barriers to the school becoming outstanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has effective systems in place in order to keep children safe. The school's record of recruitment checks on staff's suitability to work with children is compliant with current requirements. All staff have received and read the latest guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016). Staff have also received training in the government's 'Prevent' duty, which aims to deter young people from being drawn into terrorist activity.

Systems for signing in visitors to the school are robust and the use of photographic identification badges for visitors minimises the possibility of unauthorised people accessing the school site. Procedures for sixth-form students signing in and out are also electronically controlled, and allow you to know whether they are in the building should an emergency situation occur.

Pupils feel safe in school and are educated very well in making smart use of the internet. During their discussions with inspectors, pupils demonstrated a good understanding of the risks associated with the use of social networking sites. They are taught to look out for each other and to report any matter which might be a cause of concern.

Vulnerable pupils are well supported and records relating to child protection matters are maintained to a good standard, with details of actions and resolutions logged appropriately.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, my first line of enquiry was to look at how well the school's leaders had addressed the areas for improvement

identified at the time of the last inspection. You have improved the quality of English teaching so that it engages pupils' interest more. Indeed, pupils were highly complimentary about the quality of teaching they experience in English lessons, and they feel that the feedback they receive from their teachers plays a key part in helping them to improve.

- Through your list of 'non-negotiables', you expect teachers to have a good understanding of the different abilities of the pupils that they teach and to plan for their needs accordingly. This has secured better challenge for the most able pupils and is resulting in improved outcomes for this group. However, pupils with middle prior attainment could be stretched and challenged more through their teaching.
- You have made sure that students in the sixth form make the best use of their time outside of lessons by insisting that they attend supervised private study sessions in the mornings, even when they have no lessons scheduled. This has reaped rewards, which is evident through the strong outcomes students achieve by the end of Year 13.
- You have also improved the management of teaching in the school. You have a designated senior leader responsible for overseeing the quality of teaching who, together with the heads of faculty, monitors the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. You regularly identify teaching as an item on the agenda at meetings and make good use of your two lead practitioners to work with teachers who strive to improve. Your arrangement for teachers from different subject areas to work in groups of three in order to share good practice demonstrates a collective commitment to improving teaching methodology. As a result, teachers are gaining in confidence and are more prepared to 'take risks' in their teaching rather than 'play safe'.
- My second line of enquiry was to look at the extent to which the differences in outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and others were diminishing and whether the additional funding provided to the school for these pupils was being targeted appropriately.
- Teachers identify this group of pupils in their planning and, in most subjects, they plan well for their needs. Consequently, the differences between this group of pupils' outcomes and others' outcomes are steadily diminishing. Nonetheless, you acknowledge that there is further work to be done in this area so that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as others nationally. You have rightly targeted this group through the use of morning tutor time, where they are directed to attend additional intervention sessions in English, mathematics and science. You have also sought to raise this group of pupils' aspirations through a project which involves them working with a charity where PhD researchers engage with them to improve their self-belief and self-esteem.
- My third line of enquiry was to look at how well you are improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and how well you are reducing their levels of persistent absence. You have appointed an attendance officer who oversees this aspect of the school's work. Through your concerted efforts to engage the parents of these pupils, the attendance of pupils in key stage 3 has improved, but this is proving

to be more of a challenge in key stage 4, where your actions have yet to show demonstrable impact.

- My final line of enquiry was to investigate why students' outcomes in Year 13 improved so dramatically in 2016. Students achieved exceptionally well in a large number of subjects and notably in English, general studies, performing arts, religious studies and physical education. They achieved less well in mathematics, business studies and chemistry. You have successfully created a positive work ethic in the sixth form, which is complemented by high-quality careers information and guidance. Students make excellent use of their time to ensure that they supplement their learning through good use of private study sessions, which are supervised by members of staff. Your current information on students' progress forecasts improved outcomes in subjects where achievement was previously less strong.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the differences between disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and those of other pupils continue to diminish
- pupils with middle prior attainment make similar progress to their lower- and higher-attaining peers
- pupils' outcomes in science improve, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
- pupils make consistent use of the 'making a difference' response sheets when their teachers provide them with written feedback, as required in the school's marking and assessment policy
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improves in key stage 4 at the same rate as it has in key stage 3.

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

Inspectors 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 the chair of the governing body to gain her views on the school. Together with my colleague, we scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation summary document, 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 74 staff who responded to the online survey. I also considered the 263 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.