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6 June 2018

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Dear Matthew Barron

Short inspection of St John's Catholic Comprehensive

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Ben Ramdhony and Gerard Strong, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your principled and determined leadership underpins a culture of strong pastoral care and impressive academic standards. You are determined to provide high-quality education for all pupils, regardless of their ability or circumstance. You are tenacious in your pursuit of excellence, while balancing your drive with the well-being of staff and pupils. Therefore, staff at the school trust and respect you and your leadership team. Morale is high at your inclusive school. Everyone at the school works together to support the strong Catholic ethos, which is the bedrock of the school.

Pupils behave very well at the school. They are kind and respectful towards each other and their teachers. They wear their uniform smartly and take good care of their school environment. Pupils are proud of the school and told inspectors that they enjoy the wide range of clubs and other activities on offer. In lessons, we saw pupils work hard and make effective use of feedback from their teachers. Older pupils appreciate the extra support that is available to help them to prepare for public examinations. Most pupils attend very regularly, and leaders are determined in supporting the few pupils whose attendance needs to improve. One pupil, voicing the opinions of a group of pupils, said, 'Our school is a great community. It is like a family here. We have friends in every year.' In another meeting, pupils told us, 'The house system is great. The competition between houses is fierce. We enjoy that.'

Since the last inspection, leaders have developed effective systems to monitor the quality of teaching closely and check how well it contributes to strong progress. As a result, you, together with the senior leaders and governors, have an accurate view of the school's many strengths and of where improvement is possible. For example, you know that most pupils continue to make strong progress in English, mathematics and science. You also know where you can make further improvement, such as in helping pupils make more rapid progress in geography and history.

Leaders track pupils' progress meticulously, so teachers can provide prompt and effective help for pupils who are at risk of falling behind. For example, pupils in key stage 4 who find mathematics difficult have extra lessons during the day and attend revision sessions with their parents and carers in the evening. Pupils told us that they find the lessons with the parents helpful and fun. Leaders' current assessment information and work we saw in pupils' books show that these pupils make rapid progress in mathematics.

However, your focus goes beyond ensuring that pupils leave with good examination results. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including careers education, have a high priority and are well provided for at your school. Leaders continue to support pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, once they finish Year 11. As result, all but a very few pupils successfully transfer to your highly successful sixth form or other colleges.

The sixth form is led strongly and provides an inclusive and encouraging environment where students enjoy learning. The carefully designed curriculum includes a wide range of academic and vocational courses that are well matched to students' abilities and aptitudes. As a result of effective academic and pastoral support, nearly all students complete their studies and make impressive progress in the sixth form. Students are successfully prepared for a wide range of higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

Governors provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders. They visit the school regularly and analyse thoroughly pupils' progress. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and of areas where improvement is needed, such as the progress of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Governors take a professional and reflective approach to their roles. They regularly attend relevant up-to-date training. Governors understand well the current financial challenges and 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. One observed that, 'The staff look after pupils exceptionally well here and they are very well supported.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements. Records are detailed, up to date and of high quality. Before appointing staff, leaders carry out all the required employment checks thoroughly. The staff at the school work effectively with parents and external agencies to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Pupils' welfare is a high priority for staff, who are well trained and knowledgeable about the risks faced by young people.

The curriculum prepares pupils well for managing their own safety. Pupils said that they learn about how to keep safe and the importance of respecting the rights of others. The pupils that inspectors spoke to have a good understanding of staying safe online.

Pupils appreciate the concern that staff have for their safety and well-being. Pupils told inspectors that staff are approachable and that they know an adult they can turn to if they have concerns. Parents who responded to the online survey overwhelmingly agreed that their children feel safe and well cared for at the school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, my colleagues and I focused on the following lines of enquiry: how well the curriculum meets the needs and abilities of all pupils; how successfully leaders have responded to the last inspection by improving the progress made by pupils, especially higher-attaining pupils; and the extent to which the progress of all disadvantaged pupils is improving.
- You have a thorough understanding of the varying needs and abilities of the pupils at your school. You identify correctly that many of your pupils arrive at the school with low attainment and they lack confidence. To help pupils overcome these difficulties, you have designed an innovative curriculum, which engages pupils in a range of vocational and academic subjects at key stage 3. As a result, most pupils quickly become more confident and make a determined effort to succeed. Leaders' current assessment information and the work that inspectors saw in pupils' books showed that pupils are making rapid progress at key stage 3 and that they are prepared well for their key stage 4 courses.
- You have correctly identified that some pupils would be better prepared for their next steps if they followed a more challenging curriculum at key stage 4. Therefore, you have acted purposefully to ensure that the curriculum and teaching provide more effectively for higher-attaining pupils. The proportion of pupils successfully taking a modern foreign language at GCSE is increasing. Leaders are very enthusiastic about introducing separate science at GCSE so that the most able pupils are better prepared for post-16 courses. Leaders recognise that it is too soon to evaluate these changes. However, teachers' current assessments and pupils' work that inspectors saw in lessons show that pupils are making rapid progress. Inspectors noted that pupils work hard in lessons and appear to be enjoying their key stage 4 courses.

- At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve some aspects of teaching. Since then, leaders have developed effective approaches to training and developing teachers' skills. This training helps teachers plan effectively for the needs of pupils of varying abilities. Pupils now make consistently strong progress in most subjects. However, leaders are not complacent and recognise that further improvement is possible, for example in the humanities subjects.
- School leaders invest the pupil premium grant wisely to support the academic and personal development of disadvantaged pupils. Governors evaluate rigorously the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the progress of vulnerable pupils. From Year 7 onwards, disadvantaged pupils are helped to improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is tracked regularly, and teachers give effective additional help if a pupil's progress slows. As a result, leaders' current assessment information and the work we saw in lessons show that the progress of most disadvantaged pupils is now more rapid than in the past. However, there are a few pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable who do not attend regularly and whose progress remains weak. Your determined efforts to improve their attendance and their academic progress are yet to be realised.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to strengthen the support given to the small group of pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, so that their achievement and attendance improve
- the recent curriculum developments are successful in accelerating pupils' progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. 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, both formally and informally. We visited lessons to observe pupils' learning, accompanied by senior leaders, and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. My colleagues and I 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 staff survey and 55 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were also considered.