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Mrs Theresa Madden
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Dear Mrs Madden

Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic College

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 2016 with David Buckle, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2016, you have wasted no time in building upon the school's previous success by making improvements to several areas. You have quickly and accurately identified the school's few weaknesses and have put detailed plans in place to address them. For example, changes to the curriculum now ensure that all pupils entering key stage 4 are taking courses that are well matched to their interests and needs. Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, both in the main school and in the sixth form, are now more rigorous, with weaknesses being tackled quickly. You are seeking investment to improve the school's buildings, some of which are in a poor state of repair. You have quickly commanded the confidence of governors, staff, parents and pupils. All members of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire and the great majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that the school is well led and managed.

The school's ethos, 'Christ's way, His truth, Your life', shines through all aspects of school life. It is a welcoming place for pupils, parents and visitors. Staff show great support and care for pupils. Pupils recognise and appreciate their teachers' care. One sixth-form student who spoke with inspectors described the school as 'a second home'. Pupils are confident, articulate and polite. During the inspection, many pupils were eager to speak to inspectors and were fulsome in their praise of almost all aspects of the school.

Parents hold the school in equally high regard and consequently, it is regularly oversubscribed. The many responses to Parent View were overwhelmingly positive. One parent summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'All the teaching and other staff I have dealt with at the school have impressed me with their helpfulness, approachability, professionalism and dedication. My daughter has made great progress at the school and I know that she, in teenager speak, "likes it lots". It is good enough for me to know that she is happy and that, when she eventually leaves, she will look back fondly at her time at St John Fisher.'

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with further developing assessment systems, improving the impact of middle leaders and raising standards in the sixth form. Leaders have tackled these areas successfully for the most part, although improvement in sixth-form outcomes has been patchier.

Your senior leaders have introduced highly effective systems to track and analyse pupils' attainment and progress. You have, at your fingertips, detailed information about how individual pupils and groups of pupils are progressing. Leaders and teachers are using this information increasingly well to target extra help to pupils who are falling behind with their work.

You have turned a spotlight on middle leadership since your arrival in September. In subjects where outcomes are weaker, you have put extra support in place and this is beginning to yield improvement in several of these departments. At the same time, you are making good use of the strong subject leadership that exists in other departments, including those for English, mathematics and religious education, by bringing these leaders into an expanded senior leadership team.

Academic standards in the sixth form improved following the previous inspection, but have fallen back recently in some subjects. Students make good progress in some subjects, including English language, mathematics and religious education, but their progress is weaker in other subjects, including sciences and business studies. You have recently put in place more rigorous checks on the quality of teaching, especially on courses that students take in the other schools in the shared Trinity sixth form. You have also raised the entry requirements for some courses to maximise students' chances of success. It is too early, though, to see impact from these changes.

The sixth form has many strengths. Students value their sixth form, especially the care and support that teachers and other adults give them. Sixth formers are fully involved in the life of the school. They mentor younger pupils, they help in lower-school lessons and they give generously of their time, for example, in raising money for charity or by volunteering in a local hospice. Almost all students complete their courses and move on to higher education, apprenticeships or employment when they leave the sixth form.

Outcomes at the end of key stage 4, similar to those post-16, present a mixed picture. Students make strong progress in several subjects, including English, mathematics, religious education, history and languages because teaching is effective in these areas. However, weaker teaching results in slower progress in some 'option' subjects, including art, business studies, health and social care, food technology, and physical education. This is particularly the case for middle-ability boys. Your analysis suggests that the reasons are twofold. Firstly, some pupils have taken courses not well matched to their ability or interests. Secondly, teachers have not insisted on high enough standards of 'controlled assessment' work from pupils. In response, you are making changes to the key stage 4 curriculum and you have provided training for teachers in maximising pupils' achievement in controlled assessments. Additionally, all pupils in Year 11 now have a mentor who is tasked with supporting and challenging pupils with their work. You are beginning to see improvements from these strategies, specifically in better quality coursework from pupils in these subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that keeping pupils safe is everyone's top priority at your school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Policies, procedures and systems are highly effective, very well understood and followed diligently by staff. Members of staff receive regular and high-quality training. They readily pass on any concerns they have about pupils because they have confidence in leaders to deal with referrals speedily and appropriately.

All members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire and almost all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that pupils are safe in school. Inspectors spoke with many pupils during the inspection and all told us that they feel safe in school. Pupils told us that bullying is extremely rare and that they trust the school's adults to deal with any bullying or other problems that might arise.

Pupils understand the dangers that can arise when using the internet because they are taught about this in school. For example, several pupils explained to us that you should never share personal details online and you should never respond to a message from someone whom you do not know.

Pupils' only consistent criticism of the school is the poor condition of the toilets and several pupils shared this opinion with inspectors. You are aware that the condition of pupils' toilets is not good enough and you are currently planning improvements.

Inspection findings

- The school is part of Christ the King Catholic Collegiate Multi-Academy Company (the 'MAC'). Day-to-day governance of the school is delegated to the school's local academy committee (LAC), which comprises 12 local academy representatives (LARs). Some LARs are also directors of the MAC.
- LARs know the school well and they effectively support and challenge leaders in many areas of school life. For example, they check that safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. Similarly, they are aware of the weaknesses in sixth-form outcomes and have been fully involved in plans to address these. However, in some areas, LARs do not apply sufficiently detailed scrutiny to groups of pupils or weaker-performing subjects. For example, LARs have not held leaders to account for the low attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- There are LARs linked to the English, mathematics and religious education departments. They visit the school regularly and report to the LAC. However, these are the three highest performing departments in the school and weaker departments receive no such scrutiny.
- The most able pupils make consistently strong progress across all subjects. They have not suffered from inappropriate subject choices and their excellent attitudes to learning mean that they put high levels of effort into all of their work without having to be directed.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has several strengths, but also has some weaknesses. Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan receive high-quality, personalised support that ensures that they make good progress. Leaders ensure that teachers understand these pupils' needs well and teaching assistants provide effective extra help in class and at other times. Pupils who have disabilities, including several pupils who have a visual impairment, receive the same high-quality support. However, pupils who have special educational needs but do not have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan are doing less well in school. They are making slow progress in those subjects where teaching is weaker, and their attendance is low and improving only slowly. Teachers are far less aware of their needs and the pupils rarely benefit from teaching assistant support.
- Pupils who join Year 7 with weak literacy or numeracy skills receive effective extra help to catch up. For example, weak readers have a 10-week intensive course to improve their reading. Typically, pupils make between nine and 12 months' progress in this time. Inspectors listened to some of these pupils read. They read fluently, accurately sounding out words they did not know and they talked about how their reading and confidence had improved as a result of the extra help they had been given.

- Leaders are making very effective use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. All members of staff are clear that raising standards for these pupils is a top priority. Teachers take responsibility for the progress that disadvantaged pupils in their classes make, giving extra help if they begin to fall behind. Leaders use the school's high-quality assessment information and systems to target additional support and mentoring to pupils who need it. The pupil premium is also used to provide a wide range of enrichment activities, including team-building days and instrumental music lessons. Because of strong and clear leadership in this area, outcomes are improving rapidly. For example, over the last two years, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade A*–C in GCSE in both English and mathematics has risen by 10%.
- Most pupils enjoy school and attendance is consistently higher than the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved rapidly over the last two years. However, the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but who do not have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is low and is improving too slowly.
- The school's staff form a united team whose members are fully committed to the school's ethos and to providing the best possible education for its pupils. All members of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire stated that they have a clear understanding of the school's goals. The school is a popular place to work and leaders are able to select from strong fields of candidates when vacancies arise.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching in option subjects, in both the main school and the sixth form, is improved to match the high quality in those subjects where outcomes and progress for pupils are good
- provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities but do not have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is of a high quality
- governance is sharper in holding leaders to account for the progress of groups of pupils and the quality of teaching in all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the multi-academy company board, the director of education for the archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leadership team and other members of staff who have leadership responsibilities. With senior leaders, we visited several classes during the day where we observed teaching and learning and we spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with many pupils in lessons and at break- and lunchtime. We listened to pupils read and talked to them about reading and the books they enjoy. We met with four representatives of the academy company board and local academy committee. We scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, minutes of local academy committee meetings, and safeguarding and child protection records. We considered 107 responses to Parent View, and 55 pupil and 57 staff responses to their respective online inspection questionnaires.

At our initial meeting we agreed five focus areas for the inspection. These were:

- the effectiveness of leaders' actions to raise GCSE standards in weaker-performing subjects
- the effectiveness of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the quality of the 16–19 study programmes in the sixth form
- how well the pupil premium is being used to support disadvantaged pupils
- the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding procedures.