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Sean Hayes  
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Dear Mr Hayes

### **Short inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2017 with Helen Loughran, 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 the school was judged to be good in October 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 senior leadership team have ensured that the school continues to be an effective provider where pupils typically experience high-quality teaching and where their achievements are recognised and celebrated by the school community.

The school is a calm and orderly environment in which pupils are encouraged to be good role models to one another, support their friends and do their very best. Pupils are proud of their school and value the Catholic ethos, which permeates the school. They wear their uniform smartly and arrive well equipped to their lessons, ready to start learning.

Parents, staff and pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires are overwhelmingly supportive of what you have achieved for the pupils in your school. One parent, who moved their child to the school in the middle of the academic year, stated, 'It was a huge decision we made as a family, but the school's pastoral care is amazing. Best decision we ever made. Just wish we had done it sooner.' Staff morale is high and staff turnover is low because, they said, they enjoy working at the school.

Your five R's, 'resilience, resourcefulness, respect, reasoning and responsibility' are known and understood very well by the pupils in the school and they do their best to model these on a daily basis. Pupils also value the vertical tutoring system that you operate. Year 11 pupils told me that they look up to their peers in the sixth

form and enjoy being able to talk during form time about what it is like being a sixth form student in your school.

Teachers diligently plan for pupils' learning and have good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic about their subjects, and this enthusiasm is effectively conveyed to the pupils they teach. In return, pupils show positive attitudes towards their learning and work well in lessons. They respect their teachers, and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive.

The choice of subjects offered to pupils and the qualifications they take are appropriate and reviewed on an annual basis. You have considered the suitability of some courses, particularly one based on assessing pupils' skills in information and communications technology, and have replaced this with a more suitably designed course, which better meets the needs of your pupils. Equally, you enter pupils for a qualification in their community language where such a qualification exists. You do this for the right reasons: namely, to promote literacy and a culture of celebration of different pupils' cultures and heritages.

Pupils' positive attitudes and their willingness to acquire new knowledge and to deepen their understanding ensure that they make good progress over time, although pupils who have high prior attainment could achieve better. Typically, most pupils join the school with below-average or average attainment and leave the school having achieved GCSE grades which are above the national average. This was the case in 2017. Disadvantaged pupils achieve almost as well as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. Students in the sixth form now make good progress, which has not always been the case.

Your pupils are confident and self-assured individuals who take on a wide range of responsibilities, including your learning leaders who excel as role models in their subjects, and who are used as subject ambassadors. Your pupils discuss topical issues maturely and adopt a balanced approach when forming their opinions. For example, I observed a group of Year 10 pupils in a religious studies lesson discussing the rights and wrongs of same-sex marriage. Although this arrangement was in conflict with some pupils' religious beliefs, the same pupils acknowledged this as a sign of progress and tolerance in modern democratic British society.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were requested to make a number of improvements to the school. The evidence we gathered during this inspection shows that you have worked diligently to meet these requests. We observed pupils working independently and using their initiative across a number of subjects. Teachers convey their high expectations to pupils, and our scrutiny of their lesson plans and of pupils' work shows that pupils largely respond very well to these expectations. Teachers implement the school's chosen marking policy effectively, and this is helping pupils to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Finally, you have trained your teaching assistants so that they complement the teaching and are able to provide effective subject-specific support. Indeed, these colleagues make a major contribution to pupils' good progress.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding children is a strong aspect of the school's work. All staff have received and read the latest guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016), and demonstrate a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. All staff have also undergone training in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff, including those who join the school mid-year, receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. The school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff is compliant with current requirements.

Records kept by the school of children who are at risk of abuse or neglect, or who are deemed to be vulnerable, are very well maintained and informative. Records are kept securely and show clearly how concerns have been resolved. Appropriate external agencies are informed as and when necessary.

## **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my lines of enquiry was to look at how well the school meets the needs of pupils who join the school with high prior attainment. This was because this group of pupils, although a minority in the school, was the only prior attainment group to make poor progress at the end of 2017.
- I met with a group of your current most-able pupils and looked at the work in their books. Teachers clearly plan for the needs of these pupils, and the strategies they deploy do provide an element of stretch and challenge so that they deepen their understanding. Pupils with whom I met spoke positively about the challenge they are given through the use of extension tasks. Others told me that when they are deliberately placed next to less-able pupils, they are able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge through helping their peers. One pupil told me, 'It's OK to be a high achiever in this school.'
- Pupils proudly showed me examples of their work, and those in Year 9 spoke with great enthusiasm about their participation in the 'Brilliant Club', in which they are mentored by university graduates and, consequently, develop high aspirations for their futures.
- You have rightly identified the need to provide well-targeted teaching and suitably challenging work to the most able pupils. Inspectors' scrutiny of their work and review of your current achievement information suggests that the needs of these pupils are being better met than previously.
- I also looked at how well you and your governors are making use of the additional funding that you receive for the many disadvantaged pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils formed a significant proportion of pupils who completed their studies in Year 11 in 2017. Although they achieved well compared to similar pupils nationally, there was a slight difference in how well they achieved compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. The school's website did not have any evaluation of how well the additional funding had been deployed in 2016 to 2017, and there was nothing published about how the school proposes to spend the funding for this academic year.
- There is evidence to suggest that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who require sanctions because of poor behaviour has decreased. Fewer of these

pupils have had to be removed from their lessons. Our discussions with disadvantaged pupils showed that they have high aspirations for their future, with the majority wanting to go to university. The 'Brilliant Club' has had a positive impact on raising pupils' aspirations. One pupil told inspectors that the support and guidance they had received in Years 7 and 8 'made me a better person'. The work that the school does to support disadvantaged pupils in and beyond the classroom is making a real difference to their outcomes.

- My next line of enquiry was to look at how well the school is improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The former group is particularly important, as disadvantaged pupils form a significant proportion of the number of pupils on roll.
- You have worked hard to engage with the more hard-to-reach parents and have used some of your teaching assistants to best effect, using their foreign languages skills to enable them to communicate with some of your parents who speak English as an additional language or no English at all.
- You work closely with the local authority's attendance officer, and your weekly monitoring of pupils whose attendance places them at risk has ensured that the attendance rate of disadvantaged pupils has increased slightly from last year to this year. However, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities continue to attend school less regularly than others in the school.
- My final line of enquiry looked at whether students in the sixth form made better progress in 2017 and whether the 16 to 19 study programme was appropriate. Students' progress was poor in both academic and vocational subjects in 2016. Three subjects in particular were a cause for concern: health and social care, business, and information and communications technology.
- The school's leaders have put a number of effective measures in place to improve the situation. A system of rigorous meetings has been introduced involving heads of subject and subject teachers to discuss and analyse students' progress. Students now sit two sets of internal examinations per year and the outcomes trigger targeted group support, which is monitored for impact.
- Leaders now conduct sixth-form-specific work scrutinies and visits to lessons to compile evidence which shows that the sixth-form provision has improved. As a result of improving the quality of teaching, sixth-form outcomes improved significantly in 2017 and students made more rapid progress. This improvement is also matched with more regular attendance, which has risen from 93.85% in 2016 to 97.21% in the current academic year.
- The content of the 16 to 19 study programme is comprehensive. The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes appropriate activities to develop students' work-related skills, including work experience placements. The success rate of students re-sitting their English GCSE qualifications is high, but less so for those in mathematics.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they maintain the focus on meeting the needs of the most able pupils and monitor the impact of actions taken
- disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities attend school more regularly
- an evaluation of the pupil premium grant expenditure is produced for 2016, and the findings inform the planning for 2017.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you and other senior leaders, as well as a group of middle leaders, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I met with the chair and three other members of the governing body to gain their views on the school. Telephone discussions took place with a representative of the local authority and a parent. Two meetings were held with pupils.

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. We held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance.

We 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 46 members of staff and 20 pupils who responded to the online survey. We also considered the 31 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View'.

During this inspection, pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form were sitting practice examinations.