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Miss Katherine Marston
Head of School
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Dear Miss Marston

Short inspection of St John Wall Catholic School

Following my visit to the school on 4 April 2017 with Bernice Astling, 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have taken decisive and effective action to improve leadership at all levels throughout the school. This resulted in a marked improvement in examination outcomes in 2015 and again in 2016. Results had declined in 2013. In 2014, the school was issued with a warning letter from the local authority requiring improvements. The school acted promptly and successfully. The governing body worked closely with the diocese to develop and restructure the leadership and management of the school and you have gone on to make significant changes in teaching and non-teaching staff.

The key to this has been the partnership brokered by the governing body and the diocese with St Augustine's Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre in Redditch. You were seconded from this school to become head of school at St John Wall Catholic School in September 2015. The headteacher of St Augustine's School was also seconded to become executive principal of the school. These two appointments have been highly effective. You both bring a rigour, robust honesty and an unflinching approach to curriculum change. Your self-evaluation and school improvement planning are secure, highly focused and effective. Outcomes for pupils have sharply improved.

You have secured the support of your staff. A typical comment in the staff questionnaire was: 'This is a very diverse school with fantastic children and I am extremely proud to be a part of it. There has been a huge turnaround in the last two years and we are all working towards whatever is best for the children.'

Current cohorts in 2017 are making good progress. You know that there is still much to be done. For example, in 2016, outcomes in English for lower ability disadvantaged pupils and boys were not good. You have secured marked improvements for this pupil group, especially in key stage 3. However, you know that improvements in English are not consistently strong.

One of the difficult decisions you took was to close your sixth form in 2016. Together with the diocese, you and the governing body felt that it would be more effective to focus resources on pupils in key stages 3 and 4. The numbers of students recruited to your sixth form had been declining, and you had not been able to offer the full range of courses you would have liked, despite outcomes being good. It is a sign of your strength as leaders that you have taken a wider view and now work very closely with other providers in the area to offer a more appropriate range of courses. You ensured continuity of learning for students who had started their courses with you in Year 12. In 2016, every student who left Year 13 and Year 12 also went on to further and higher education, employment or training.

Pupils in Year 11 spoke very highly of the independent careers advice and guidance they received. In 2016, every pupil who left key stage 4 went on to education, employment or training.

At the last inspection in 2012, you were asked to work on two main actions:

- The first was to improve the quality of pupils' speaking and writing across all subjects. We could see that you have made progress with this. In subjects where writing is important, such as humanities, pupils achieve well. However, in key stage 4 English, the quality of writing is frequently of too low a quality. In some workbooks, there is imaginative, coherent and well-organised writing. In others, there are still too many pieces of work with basic errors of spelling and punctuation.
- The second was to improve the quality of leadership across all subject areas. You have restructured almost all of your leadership positions across the curriculum. You are training your leaders well, and most are now effectively planning for good outcomes and tracking pupils' progress successfully. Although outcomes in English for pupils in key stage 3 are improving, leadership in this subject is less effective, especially in key stage 4.

In 2014, the school was part of an Ofsted national survey of mathematics. Following that, you were asked to work on these aspects:

- Improve outcomes for most- and less able pupils and ensure that progress for all is good. Outcomes in mathematics in 2016 were nationally average for the most able and the less able. Progress is now good in mathematics for pupils currently at the school, especially in key stage 3.

- Ensure that subject leadership is effective. You have taken decisive and imaginative action to ensure improvements. Your collaboration with St Augustine's School is helping staff plan more effectively and make sure that the standard of testing and assessments is high. This means that pupils can make improvements in their workbooks and make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The welfare and safety of pupils are strengths of the school. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. You and your staff place the highest priority on pupils' welfare and safety. Your record keeping is effective. Your staff look after vulnerable pupils very well. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, for example, is low.

You maintain the single central record accurately. You train your staff and governors successfully in safeguarding. Pupils are safe and say that they feel safe. Pupils know how to keep themselves and others safe online. You have informed the whole school community about the dangers of radicalisation through the effective delivery of the 'Prevent' duty programme. You make available some highly informative and helpful safeguarding resources for pupils, teachers and parents. You value diversity and celebrate difference. This means that pupils have a positive attitude towards themselves and others.

Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection, we agreed on the focus areas for our work.

- The first of these was the progress of disadvantaged pupils in English. In 2016, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was not as strong as you had expected. In particular, low-ability disadvantaged pupils and boys had made less progress. Over the past two years, there have been changes to the leadership of English. Inspectors could see that this year, the progress of these pupils has shown marked improvements. We saw books where many pupils were showing real pride in their work. Pupils were successfully comparing poetic structures, analysing 19th-century non-fiction texts and using their knowledge of grammatical terms well. However, there is still a lack of quality in too many disadvantaged pupils' workbooks in key stage 4. In some books, there is poorly completed work and a lack of progress in basic skills such as punctuation, spelling and response to reading. You are working relentlessly to overcome a legacy of underachievement in these pupils' English learning. You know that improvements are inconsistent and you know that this must change urgently.

- Another area we explored was the progress of low-ability disadvantaged pupils in mathematics. Inspectors could see in pupils' workbooks that these pupils are now making good progress. Pupils are able to use mathematical knowledge fluently and accurately. Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress because your work with primary schools helps teachers plan effectively. The work you are doing in collaboration with St Augustine's School is proving especially helpful. Staff of your mathematics department share their practice with each other more regularly. You have improved the reliability and accuracy of mathematics assessments. So, pupils understand the skills they need to improve with greater clarity.
- Inspectors also examined the outcomes for low-ability disadvantaged pupils in languages and middle-ability disadvantaged pupils' progress in science. In 2016, outcomes for these pupils had contributed to underperformance in the English Baccalaureate. In these subjects, in pupils' workbooks now, we could see strong evidence of progress. In science books, we could see progress in answering at length and in depth in key stage 3 and key stage 4. Pupils are making progress using scientific methods and language. In languages, we could see in books that pupils are enjoying the challenge of, for example, developing their vocabulary skills and growing in confidence in developing verb and subject agreement.
- We also looked at attendance. Attendance has been higher than national averages for secondary schools in England for the past three years. It continues to be high. Last year, persistent absence was too high for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This year, persistent absence for these pupil groups has shown a marked and sustained improvement on last year. Attendance for all groups of pupils and all year groups is high. Persistent absence for all groups is very low.
- You have worked relentlessly and successfully on attendance. You support families thoughtfully and regularly. You work with the local authority and other agencies effectively, sharing information so that you can take early action to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils feel welcomed by the school and enjoy their learning. Pupils feel ambitious for themselves and their school. You reward pupils' good behaviour and sanction poor behaviour fairly and consistently. As a result, pupils want to come to school and feel safe in your school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- action is taken to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in English in key stage 4, including swift improvements in the quality of their reading and writing
- there is a high level of subject leadership throughout the school and that leadership of English improves markedly and with urgency.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We inspected 15 lessons and scrutinised pupils' workbooks on each occasion. An inspector conducted a joint work scrutiny of a sample of workbooks with a senior leader. We met with the head of school, the executive principal and other members of your leadership team. We met with representatives of the governing body and staff representing St Augustine's Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre. Inspectors held meetings with pupils. We scrutinised your single central record, met with the designating safeguarding lead and scrutinised the full range of your records of recruitment, welfare plans and actions taken to keep pupils safe. We scrutinised a wide range of documentation the school produces as part of its self-evaluation and development planning, policies, and documents published on the website. Inspectors discussed with you published information about the school, and this included the warning letter from the local authority and an Ofsted national survey of mathematics of which your school was a part. We looked at responses from the staff questionnaire. There were very few responses to Parent View, and no responses to the pupil questionnaire.