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Dear Paul

### **Short inspection of St Joseph's Catholic College**

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018 with Jonathan Jones and Andrew Brown, 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 calm and measured approach enables you to work with other senior leaders in a collegiate, collaborative way. This ensures that responsibilities are delegated effectively and the school operates well. Leaders are open and honest about the school's weaknesses. They have not shied away from confronting them but, instead, are taking the right action to overcome them.

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have worked successfully to increase the effectiveness of middle leadership. This was identified as an area for improvement at the inspection. Subject leaders now work with each other more closely to share best practice. They also take more responsibility for pupils' outcomes because senior leaders hold them to greater account.

Governance has continued to strengthen since the previous inspection. Leaders work closely with governors and, consequently, have developed a relationship based on trust, openness and accountability. Governors have been supported by the school improvement adviser to prioritise the most important issues and ask the most pertinent questions of leaders. They use different sources of information, such as published progress information, to hold leaders to account over the achievement of pupils. Consequently, governors are clear that the achievement of pupils in science needs to be better. They are challenging leaders to take more urgent, decisive action in this area to improve pupils' outcomes. Governors are committed to their work and contribute different areas of expertise. For example, two of the

governors who spoke to me during the inspection have expertise in human resources and chartered accountancy respectively.

Strong leadership has led to improvements in teaching and learning in different areas of the school. These, in turn, have led to sustained strong achievement in subjects such as mathematics, English, religious education and languages, since the previous inspection. In different year groups and subjects, pupils apply themselves to their studies. They behave well and share positive relationships with staff. This is because leaders have created an orderly school environment, underpinned by the Catholic faith that forms a key part of the school's identity. This is a school where pupils respect others and, in large part, work harmoniously with each other in a purposeful way.

However, a minority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, are not satisfied with some aspects of the school's work. (It should be noted that the number of responses was low given the number of pupils who attend the school.) They reported that the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in some subjects has been affected by staffing changes. This is considered further in the inspection findings below. These respondents also said that behaviour was a concern in some lessons. However, inspection evidence indicates that behaviour across the school, in lessons and during social time, is good.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of leaders' actions to raise pupils' achievement in subjects in which they do not perform as well as they do in others. The second line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Thirdly, we considered to what extent Year 13 students were being supported to achieve their potential, in light of the suspension of the sixth form at the end of this academic year. Finally, we considered whether safeguarding is effective. These lines of enquiry are considered below where they have not already been referred to.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Designated safeguarding staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They communicate effectively with each other to ensure that staff are fully aware of child protection procedures and that pupils are well supported. Safeguarding leads have used the findings from a comprehensive external review of safeguarding to sharpen their practice further.

Staff have been appropriately trained and understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. They know whom to speak to and how to make referrals should they have concerns. Safeguarding leads work well with external agencies to meet the needs of individual pupils. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are in place. These checks are comprehensive and up to date.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors reported that they feel safe in school. One reason for this is that they feel open and comfortable speaking to staff should they have

any worries. They are highly positive about the pastoral support they receive. The school's culture promotes this openness. For example, in response to a recent incident of pupils using inappropriate xenophobic language, staff held assemblies to confront this issue head on. The school's culture promotes tolerance of difference and pupils reported that they get on with each other well. Moreover, pupils said that bullying does not occur, although this view is not shared by a very small minority of parents who responded to Parent View.

## **Inspection findings**

- Pupils' progress at key stage 4 has been above average overall and in subjects such as mathematics, English and languages over time. However, progress in science has been below average over time. In 2017, progress in certain humanities subjects and subjects in the open element of the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) were below average.
- Strong teaching is evident in subjects such as mathematics and English. This is because leaders have prioritised improvement in these subjects over time. Lead practitioners in these subjects now work with increasing effectiveness to improve the quality of teaching in other subjects, such as science. The new head of the science department knows that standards are not high enough. He is working with other staff in a proactive and determined way to 'turn things around'. The quality of teaching is beginning to improve as a result, but there is further work to do. Improving teaching is not yet having a noticeable impact on outcomes.
- Teachers across the school demonstrate good subject knowledge. Consequently, they teach with confidence and question pupils effectively to challenge misconceptions. Pupils respond well to this teaching and engage with tasks in a focused, studious way. Nevertheless, some Parent View respondents and pupils reported that, when teachers have been absent and classes have been covered by temporary supply staff, the quality of teaching and behaviour is sometimes not good enough. Recent staffing changes have had a negative impact on pupils' experience of geography. Leaders acknowledge this and have taken action to ensure that the school is now fully staffed across the curriculum.
- As a result of good teaching, pupils, including those of middle ability, learn well in most of their subjects. The work in pupils' books shows that most teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. The majority of pupils take pride in their work and present it to a high standard. Pupils of different abilities are set challenging tasks, which enable them to acquire skills and knowledge appropriate for their ages. One pupil told me that lessons are 'quite challenging, which is good. Most teachers teach us in a way we find enjoyable.' However, this is not universally the case across teachers and subjects. A minority of teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and the presentation of their work are not high enough.
- Leaders have prioritised the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. To this effect, an assistant principal has been appointed with the sole responsibility of raising achievement for these pupils. Leaders have been quick to analyse reasons for the underperformance of pupils who left Year 11 in 2017. Consequently, the profile of this group of pupils has been raised among staff, and teachers tailor support

packages to individual pupils in their classes. Leaders have introduced a range of strategies to support current disadvantaged pupils. These are helping pupils to make better progress, although gaps between their achievement and that of their peers are still too large in some year groups. Strategies to raise achievement are not yet fully effective because they are not evaluated sharply enough in terms of their impact on pupils' progress. Historically, disadvantaged pupils have achieved well in comparison to their peers. The year 2017 was the exception to the rule.

- Staff have the same expectations of disadvantaged pupils as of their peers. Work in pupils' books and inspectors' observations of learning show that these pupils want to participate in their learning and take pride in the work they produce.
- Students in Year 13 are achieving well in most of their subjects. They benefit from highly positive relationships with staff. The relaxed but business-like atmosphere in class secures students' interest and helps them to make greater progress. Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge, and students receive a high level of individualised support, which challenges them to move forward. Students learn well as a result. In a minority of cases where this does not happen, leaders are aware and taking action to improve the quality of students' experiences.
- Leaders and governors have taken the decision to suspend the sixth form indefinitely at the end of this year. This decision has been made in light of falling rolls, financial considerations and the extensive range of locally available provision. Some parents do not agree with the decision. Leaders have taken steps to engage with parents to explain their rationale, but some parents remain unconvinced.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- action continues to be taken to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in science
- all staff across the curriculum, including temporary supply staff, have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve and of the presentation of their work
- strategies to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are fully evaluated for impact so that these pupils make comparable progress with their peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, the team of inspectors and I spoke with you and other senior leaders. We also spoke with representatives of the governing body, pupils, members of the designated safeguarding team, the sixth-form coordinator, the pupil premium coordinator and the school improvement adviser.

Inspectors made visits to lessons with members of staff to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' books.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I also considered governing body minutes and notes of visit from external advisers. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children.

I took account of 56 responses to the Parent View online survey.