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Mrs M Hughes
Principal
St Edmund's Catholic Academy
Compton Park
Compton Road West
Wolverhampton
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Short inspection of St Edmund's Catholic Academy

Following my visit with Nigel Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 1 March 2016, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, the school has become an academy (in July 2013) and is part of Bishop Cleary Catholic Multi Academy Company. You were appointed as Principal in September 2014 and some members of your senior leadership team are new in post this academic year.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. Your leadership is clear-sighted and organised and you are supported by a capable senior team and informed academy representatives (governors). Under your leadership, senior leaders work with rigour and clarity of purpose. Middle leaders have been galvanised and play a greater part in improving the quality of teaching. You create opportunities to develop and broaden the leadership skills of others, resulting in effective and sustainable leadership within the academy.

The previous inspection report praised the school for the behaviour of pupils, high expectations of leaders and governors, lively lessons and good teaching. The report also identified that pupils achieve well in a range of subjects. These features remain of very high quality in the academy.

The previous inspection report also directed the school to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching. It recommended that the school should achieve this through ensuring that there are more opportunities for teachers to learn from sharing

excellent teaching that already takes place. In addition, leaders were tasked with making sure that lessons help the most-able pupils make even better progress. Since the last inspection, leaders have addressed these areas effectively. Teachers benefit from regular opportunities to develop their teaching skills at the academy. Leaders' focus on teaching and learning through developing staff is helping to make sure that all pupils gain from the best practice and encourages teachers to try new approaches to improve their practice. Senior and subject leaders make frequent checks on teachers' performance and there have been improvements in the quality of teaching within the academy. As a result of these and other improvements, most current pupils in most subjects across all key stages are making good progress. Furthermore, improvements in the proportion of most-able pupils achieving at least five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, look set to continue. In 2015, the academy was above the national average for this measure.

You and your team are ambitious for pupils in the main school and learners in the sixth form. You ensure that the culture of high expectations for achievement, exemplary behaviour and a strong community spirit are maintained and encompassed by the culture and ethos of the academy. Pupils and learners are well turned out and show pride in themselves and in the academy. This is reflected in the care and respect that so many of them show towards each other and adults within the academy. One pupil commented that the academy community is 'strong together'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are complete, detailed and of a high quality. Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements and are carried out in an exemplary manner. Staff receive appropriate, frequent and up-to-date training which ensures that they understand well their responsibility to keep pupils and learners safe. As a result, leaders and staff understand what to do if they have concerns about the safety or welfare of pupils. Key leaders make timely and appropriate use of other agencies and organisations in response to concerns. Academy staff and parents are very confident in the academy's work to keep everyone safe. Health and safety are a high priority and are overseen by academy representatives (governors) and directors. However, leaders should ensure full compliance with actions identified in risk assessments to minimise potential hazards in practical lessons.

Pupils and learners say that they feel safe in all areas of the academy and have an awareness of issues such as risks from violence and those potentially involving the internet. Some pupils and learners said that they would welcome further information to encourage healthy lifestyles.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have robust systems to collect regular and accurate information about the achievement of pupils and learners in the academy. All staff know how well pupils are doing because the information collected is accurate. 'Cobra committees' of staff meet regularly to discuss the progress of pupils and to identify ways to support those who are falling behind. Analysis of how well learners in the sixth form are doing has not previously been as effective as for other pupils in the school. The head of sixth form is now making better use of this information but this has not yet had an impact on the outcomes of sixth-form learners.
- Leaders and academy representatives have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas that need further improvement. Senior leaders evaluate the academy rigorously using a wide variety of information. As a result, academy improvement plans successfully identify key priorities.
- Leaders have taken effective action to reduce the gap between the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in the school and nationally. For example, in 2015 the proportion of disadvantaged pupils at St Edmund's who made at least expected progress in English was above the average for all pupils nationally. The gaps between the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in the school and nationally are narrowing in mathematics.
- In 2015, three quarters of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 made at least expected progress and one third made more than the expected progress in English and mathematics as a result of consistently good teaching. The rates of progress in English and mathematics in 2015 increased sharply from those achieved in 2014.
- The proportion of all pupils who achieved the English Baccalaureate at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 increased from 2014 and compares favourably with national values.
- Too few disadvantaged pupils achieved the English Baccalaureate in 2015 and the gap between the proportion of these and other pupils in the academy who achieve this measure increased from the previous year. As part of their efforts to close this gap, leaders have made recent changes to the ways pupils pick option subjects from the wide range of appropriate academic and vocational qualifications available. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes.
- Bishop Cleary Multi Academy Company has created clear roles and responsibilities for directors and academy representatives who effectively hold senior and middle leaders to account for their work in improving outcomes for pupils.
- Opportunities to prepare pupils and learners for life in modern Britain have been mapped throughout the curriculum and are complemented by activities during form time and on whole-school 'drop down' days. Although fundamental British values are embedded within the culture of the academy, and reflected in attitudes and behaviours, not all pupils are aware that these values are associated with being British.

- Academy staff provide first-rate opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally within lessons and through assemblies and extra-curricular opportunities. The academy reinforces its mission 'to love and serve the Lord', and further enriches the Catholic ethos pupils and learners experience by celebrating the wide range of faiths and cultures to which members of the academy community belong.
- Academy records indicate that pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and that lesson time is purposeful and productive. In the lessons observed during our visit, many pupils were engaged because teachers provided work that challenged them to achieve well and make the progress they are capable of. However, inspectors saw a minority of boys who were not as fully involved in their learning as their peers. As a result, a few boys were not trying hard enough with their work.
- Behaviour around the academy site is calm and orderly and the recently introduced 'CARE' code of conduct, which is underpinned by the academy's ethos and values, supports this. The academy has effective systems in place to monitor and analyse patterns of behaviour and in turn this informs the development of strategies to further raise conduct and behaviour. There is no evidence of the use of derogatory or abusive language within the academy. Overall rates of exclusion are low, but disadvantaged pupils are more likely to be excluded than other pupils at the academy.
- Attendance is high for most groups of pupils. However, absence rates are higher for pupils with special educational needs or disability, and for disadvantaged pupils. Effective actions including improved engagement with parents and frequent analysis of attendance information have resulted in low persistent absence rates for all groups of pupils.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils are well prepared to move on from Key Stage 4. Pupils are able to access independent careers advice and guidance. In addition, all Year 11 pupils meet individually with senior leaders to discuss their future plans and aspirations. As a result, the proportion of pupils who successfully continue in education, training or employment after Year 11 is above the national average.
- The academy's sixth form meets the 16 to 19 study programme requirements. The sixth form operates in a consortium with another school that is nearby. Additionally, learners from a third school are able to access courses within the consortium. As a result, learners are able to remain members of the academy and benefit from the opportunity to study a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications. Teachers from the academy share responsibility for all courses offered with colleagues from the partner school and positive relationships exist between them. However, middle leaders in the academy are unclear of their precise roles and responsibilities regarding leadership of sixth-form courses.

- You and your team have rightly identified that improving learners' outcomes in the academic subjects at sixth form is a key priority for the academy. Leaders have demonstrated their capacity to tackle this issue through the recent appointment of a head of sixth form. Action taken, in collaboration with the academy's improvement adviser, has demonstrated improvements in learners' study skills and increased expectations of staff who teach the sixth form. Further work is required to build on these improvements, particularly in ensuring that learners' progress is sufficient so that they can achieve the highest grades.
- Sixth-form learners spoke highly of the support they receive, and noted the increased expectations placed on them this year. They receive high-quality support and guidance and benefit from thorough preparation for their futures. The proportion of learners who progress to higher education is above the national average. Those learners who do not progress to higher education move on to other appropriate courses, apprenticeships or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and academy representatives should ensure that:

- strategies to further raise progress and attendance and reduce exclusion rates for pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs or disability are continually evaluated and action is taken to implement additional approaches
- professional training opportunities in the academy that focus on sixth-form teaching and learning impact positively on learners' progress and achievement
- middle leaders can clearly identify their roles and responsibilities within the sixth-form consortium and so take responsibility for improvement within their subject areas.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of Academy Representatives, the Director of Education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met you, other senior leaders, and middle leaders, including the designated lead for safeguarding in the school. I met with academy representatives (governors) including the vice-chair, directors of the multi-academy company and the academy's improvement adviser. Pupils and learners gave inspectors their views on the academy when they spoke to us in lessons, around the academy site between lessons and during a formal meeting. We also considered the views of pupils through the 47 responses to the online questionnaire. We joined you and another senior leader in short visits to lessons where we spoke to pupils about their work and looked at their work in books. We spoke to academy staff and also took their views into account through the 37 responses to an inspection questionnaire for staff. The views of parents were considered through the 49 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information on pupils' progress and scrutinised other records about keeping pupils safe, their attendance and punctuality, and their behaviour.