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Mr John Murray
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Dear Mr Murray

Short inspection of The Catholic High School Chester

Following my visit to the school on 15 March with Bernard Robinson, 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education provided by the school since the last inspection. You have established clearly defined values and beliefs across the school. Effective monitoring across the school has ensured that you know the strengths and abilities of your staff. The leadership of teaching is good. Staff are appropriately supported with training that develops their teaching further. Consequently, staff in all specialisms are making steady improvements across all aspects of the school's work. Middle leaders in core subjects are rigorous and knowledgeable and this is securing strong achievement by pupils. Leaders echo your high aspirations for academic achievement. You have selected a skilled leadership team that embraces and advocates Catholic values and drives improvements across the school. Consequently, most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been tackled effectively.

The school has a distinct 'family feel' that emphasises respect and compassion for all. Pupils are happy and loyal to their school and are encouraged to be intellectually curious and independent thinkers. Pupils are polite, welcoming to visitors and keen to discuss their work and experiences of learning. During break and lunchtime, they cooperate and clearly enjoy spending time together. Pupils who attended an interview with inspectors stated that behaviour is good in their lessons and that learning is rarely disrupted. You and your staff place an equal value on academic

achievement and pupils' personal development, which sums up the *raison d'être* of the school. All staff play a lead role in nurturing pupils' confidence, empathy and spiritual awareness. You expect all pupils to work hard, and aim high. You provide a supportive environment where everyone is encouraged to strive and achieve their potential. The majority of pupils display pride in their work and good attitudes to learning. The pupils talked fondly about the 'academy awards' and the rich and diverse extra-curricular opportunities that are available across the school. The support for British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding of pupils is strong.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leadership of this area is strong and rooted in Christian values. For example, the recent non-curriculum day, 'Love thy neighbour, love thy self', allowed pupils to learn about keeping safe. You have also established strong systems to make sure staff and visitors are vetted to be able to work with pupils. There is a clear focus on keeping pupils safe; procedures are fully in place with leaders and governors fulfilling their statutory duties effectively. Your staff engage effectively and appropriately with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that pupils are supported and safe. For example, pastoral leaders, the nurse and the welfare officer meet and share information regularly as a working focus group. This has ensured that 'no stone goes unturned' in supporting individual pupils. You recognise the importance of safeguarding and have ensured that all staff receive a wide range of training on potential areas of risk for young people. Staff have keenly engaged in 'Prevent' training to help them to identify pupils who may be at risk of being radicalised. Staff are also well informed about current national safeguarding issues; they have received training about their responsibilities with regard to female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- Overall achievement in English and mathematics at GCSE is consistently strong and above national averages. Pupils' attainment in a wide range of subjects is above national averages.
- Leaders have taken effective action to narrow the gaps between the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in the school and nationally. Information you provided about pupils currently in the school shows that these gaps are continuing to close. The gap in English is closing more rapidly than in mathematics.
- The most-able pupils benefit from the culture of high expectations and improved teaching; they make excellent progress. The proportions of pupils who gain the higher A* and A grades remain consistently high in a number of subjects such as: geography, food technology, religious studies, physics, mathematics and physical education.
- Current progress measures across all year groups and across a range of subjects show that pupils make good progress.

- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is around the national average. These pupils are well cared for and receive consistent, effective support that helps them to achieve. The Autistic Resource Unit is particularly effective as a beacon of inclusivity. Pupils who access the unit are carefully tracked and sensitively supported. Consequently they make great strides in progress both academically and socially.
- Governors are very well informed about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching within the school. They have established well-organised committees, well matched to governors' strengths. These committees are used as appropriate platforms for leaders to communicate a great deal of high-quality information. However, governors have not checked that the school complies with government requirements regarding information that should be published on its website.
- Leaders have ensured that robust and accurate systems are in place to track and monitor pupils' performance at Key Stage 4. Leaders across the school identify pupils who need further help and support and evaluate the effectiveness of their actions in improving pupils' outcomes. Governors receive accurate information regarding pupils' and learners' performance in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. They ask astute questions and support and challenge leaders well. They 'shine a light on' any underperformance and insist on improvements that will continue to move the school forward. However, governors are not always able to challenge leaders on the performance of pupils at Key Stage 3 as robustly. This is because leaders' systems to track and monitor pupils' performance at Key Stage 3 are not sharply focused; nor is information presented to governors as frequently and in as much detail as Key Stage 4.
- Parents speak warmly about the school and the efforts of teachers and leaders to ensure that their children thrive and achieve. Some parents eloquently commented on the online questionnaire (Parent View): 'The school works hard to follow its motto of "Christo Fidelis" and instils in the students an awareness of social responsibility ... pupils leave [as] caring and good citizens' and 'I feel the school works hard to help provide my children with a balanced preparation for life and tolerance and understanding of the wide world of faiths, beliefs and life choices.'
- Staff care about the school and understand the culture and ethos that underpins learning. A comment by a member of staff on the online survey conducted by inspectors typified the views of many: 'There is a family feel to the school. Staff and students respect each other and work hard to care for those less fortunate than themselves. The Catholic ethos is evident in everyday life at the school.'
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are good. Teachers uphold the behaviour policy and this promotes an environment where pupils can enjoy learning. Consequently the rate of exclusion of pupils has fallen and attendance has improved since the last inspection. While attendance has improved for those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding and those who

have special educational needs or disability, it is still slightly below national averages.

- Leaders remain focused on improving attendance still further across the school and use a wide variety of strategies to promote the importance of attendance among pupils. However, the systems to track attendance are not always sharply focused on specific cohorts of pupils. Consequently, actions to address specific cohorts of pupils do not always have a strong impact. Pupils' attendance targets are not highly aspirational.
- Standards in mathematics are strong within the school because of incisive leadership and new curriculum developments. Problem solving and mathematical reasoning is woven into the curriculum. Pupils undergo frequent assessments to allow teachers to gauge their understanding and correct misconceptions. Pupils' engagement in mathematics has improved and as a result a larger number of pupils are now taking further mathematics at GCSE and continuing on to A-level mathematics.
- Standards in English are very strong within the school because of the exemplary leadership of English. The curriculum is well structured to ensure pupils develop strength in their writing and understanding. English teachers have high expectations and ignite an interest and love for learning: consequently progress and attainment is well above national average.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan well-structured lessons that cater for all pupils. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and anticipate their needs so that barriers to learning are removed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they pursue further improvement of pupils' attendance by raising expectations across the school and community
- persistent absenteeism of a small proportion of disadvantaged pupils is reduced even further
- the school complies with 'The School Information Regulations 2012' regarding publishing curriculum content information on the school website
- they develop a rigorous system for tracking of pupils' assessment at Key Stage 3 to match the very effective system that is in place at Key Stage 4.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chester Catholic Academies Partnership, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors undertook 'learning walks' and observed teaching and learning in many subjects across the school.
- Meetings took place with you, your deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a member of the academy trust, and a group of pupils.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils at breaktime and around the school to gather views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in some pupils' books in lessons observed during the 'learning walks' and also completed a separate scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors examined a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance and information relating to pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account 89 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), along with 74 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 96 responses to the online pupils' questionnaire.