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Jonathan Smart  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Smart

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

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2016 with David Woodhouse, 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 2010.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A shared vision exists among all who work at St John Fisher that every child deserves to receive the education and pastoral care they need to fulfil their aspirations, desires and potential. This is characterised by the school's ongoing review of provision to ensure it meets individual needs and the willingness of staff to 'go the extra mile' for any pupil.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils lies at the heart of everything you do and this is reflected in the pupils' enthusiasm for learning and the very good relationships they have with each other and with staff. Parents are very supportive of the school. Comments such as: 'they go above and beyond to deal with issues inside and outside of school', 'the support we receive is brilliant... it has made a real difference to my family', and 'the nurturing attitude of the staff has allowed my son's self-confidence to increase tenfold', are typical of the views expressed by parents who completed the online Parent View questionnaire.

The school has maintained, and in some cases improved on, previous good outcomes. Overall, pupils make good progress from their different starting points and every one of last summer's Year 11 cohort moved on to further education, employment or training. This can be attributed to teachers' high expectations of what pupils can achieve, effective teaching and the strong support given to those

deemed to be falling behind or requiring further encouragement. Pupils attend school regularly, very few are temporarily excluded and none have been permanently excluded.

The school understands well its strengths and weaknesses and has well-considered plans in place to address any areas for development. Plans include clear and appropriate actions and timely arrangements for monitoring impact. Following a detailed analysis of pupil outcomes in 2015 the school has made the raising of aspirations and achievement for the most-able pupils, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, a key feature of its work.

The previous inspection identified the need to ensure that teachers monitor pupils' progress in lessons and the quality of written work more effectively. This has been successfully addressed through the introduction of new systems for marking and feedback, which pupils say help to improve their learning. The previous inspection's recommendation to develop the curriculum further to better meet pupils' needs is now part of the school's ongoing review of provision.

Governors support and challenge leaders well. They are ambitious for the school and have an accurate understanding of its performance. They are capable of interrogating performance information and ask appropriate and searching questions. They inform themselves of the work of the school further by holding regular meetings with pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

The school community takes the safeguarding of its members very seriously. Governors have received training in all aspects of safeguarding and are proactive in checking arrangements for the training of staff. Thorough checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. Surveys and questionnaires indicate that 96% of parents, 90% of pupils and all staff agree with the statement that pupils are safe in school. The safeguarding of pupils who are taught by alternative providers away from the school site is regularly monitored.

Your school ethos is strong on the promotion of respect for others and the celebration of diversity. Many aspects of safeguarding such as tackling prejudiced-based bullying, the prevention of child sexual exploitation and internet safety are embedded in the curriculum. School records show few incidents of bullying and the pupils who met with inspectors considered bullying to be rare. This is supported by the pupil questionnaire, which indicates an overwhelming majority believe that bullying either does not happen or is dealt with well if it does occur.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and governors have a clear vision and high ambitions for the school and its community. You know your school well and have sound plans in place to ensure future continued success.
- Morale is high within the school community. Staff who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school and its

leadership. The comments made by members of staff, such as 'all students are treated like individuals but we all work together as a community', and 'this is a fantastic school to work in and I am proud of my association with it', are representative of the views expressed by many.

- The tracking and analysis of pupils' academic progress is very thorough. Information on pupils' performance is used effectively to ensure that 'no child is left behind'. This is particularly the case for those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are disadvantaged or have special educational needs or disability. As a result, the outcomes for these pupils are strong and improving. The achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is narrowing and in some cases has closed.
- A strong focus on raising the achievement and aspirations of the most-able pupils is having a positive impact on their progress and attainment. The school has set ambitious targets that teachers and pupils are striving hard to meet. Although the school's 'Most Able Improvement Plan' informs the work of all departments, reviews of the mathematics and science departments in particular have led to the appointment of staff to support further the learning of this group. Other interventions include extra sessions for potential A\* pupils in English and a one-to-one lunchtime support club for the most-able pupils in modern foreign languages.
- To address a dip in the overall progress made by pupils in mathematics in 2014 the school put in place a range of strategies including: the appointment of a numeracy coordinator to reinforce mathematics across the curriculum; a Year 11 breakfast maths club; and the appointment of two part-time specialist teachers to provide coaching and team teaching opportunities and strengthen mathematics intervention work. The impact has been an improvement in proportions of pupils now making expected, and more than expected, progress in mathematics.
- The curriculum was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection and curriculum development is now a particularly strong feature of the school's work. The provision is regularly reviewed and redesigned to meet individual interests, needs and aspirations. Recent examples of this are the plans to introduce GCSE dance and the move to a two-week timetable to enable the facilitation of a wider range of options.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced with a good mix of traditional and vocational studies. The very high take-up of modern foreign languages, humanities and performing arts at key stage 4 is testament to the strength of the subjects at key stage 3. Nevertheless, plans are underway to increase further the challenge in the key stage 3 curriculum through the introduction of even more rigorous programmes of study. To support this, the school has developed a greater focus on academic as well as pastoral progression from key stage 2 to key stage 3, with pupils' workbooks being transferred and continued from Year 6 to Year 7.
- The curriculum offer for pupils with special educational needs or disability is well matched to their needs, bespoke and personalised. Pupils and parents value highly the support given in the nurture groups. In 2015, all pupils with special educational needs or disability moved on to further education, training or employment.

- The school is also introducing alternative awards for those who may struggle with some traditional GCSE courses. These include the Cambridge National Award in physical education, the NCFE level 2 Certificate in Nutrition and health, and a BTEC award in performing arts. Before offering these courses the school has ensured there are suitable progression routes available at local post-16 colleges, for example the BTEC extended diploma in performing arts.
- The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular options including a range of music and dance clubs, and various sports. The school ensures that out-of-school trips and visits to places such as London, or to see the Halle Orchestra, are available to all regardless of pupils' ability to pay. Most of the pupils who met with inspectors did attend some extra-curricular options. However, the tracking and analysis of pupils' engagement in enrichment activities, and the impact of this on outcomes for individuals and groups, is limited.
- In classrooms pupils are eager to learn, keen to respond to teachers' questions and happy to ask for help when they need it. Relationships are very good with pupils often seen supporting each other with their learning. Teachers have high expectations, set challenging work and targets and provide good support and feedback to help pupils make good progress.
- The school provides a library period in key stage 3 and encourages reading. However, not all pupils read widely and often, particularly at key stage 4.
- Encouraging all pupils to be ambitious and aim high is a key focus for the school's 'Raising Aspirations' programme. This includes visits to institutions of higher education for pupils in key stage 4 and the introduction of a Year 7 honour roll that targets the most-able disadvantaged pupils. To support this scheme the school is creating mathematics guidance booklets for parents to help them to support their child's learning. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from one-to-one interviews with the school's pupil premium champions and individual educational plans that focus on their aspirations for the future.
- Attendance is good for all groups of pupils and there has been a steep reduction in the number of temporary exclusions. The school is cited by the local authority as a beacon of good practice for nurture and support, particularly for pupils with special educational needs or disability, disadvantaged pupils and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The school was awarded the Positive Mental Health Gold Award in 2015 and staff have recently undertaken training to help them support pupils with mental health needs through timely and appropriate interventions.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that teachers further embed the work in the school's 'Most Able Improvement Plan'
- ensure that pupils' engagement in wider school activities is monitored to ensure entitlement for all, and analysed to determine impact
- further encourage pupils to read widely and often.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors held meetings with you and members of the senior leadership team, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and a group of 10 pupils. Meetings were held with teachers responsible for leading improvements in special educational needs and disability, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and the curriculum. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding checks and record-keeping. They also scrutinised the minutes of the governing body and information relating to learners' progress, and analysed 49 Parent View responses, 97 pupil and 71 staff questionnaire responses. Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of abilities and looked at pupils' workbooks and files.